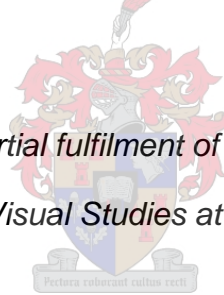

AFTER BIRTH

Abjection and Maternal Subjectivity in Svea Josephy's *Confinement*

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DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I investigate the radical reframing of maternal representation in the photographic series by Cape Town-based artist Svea Josephy (b. 1969), entitled *Confinement* 2005-ongoing. Using Julia Kristeva's theorisation of the maternal body's relation to abjection, as well as its imperative to the remodelling of the relationship between the corporeal and the cultural, I explore how Josephy's images explicitly engage with the Kristevan abject in order to disrupt cultural inscriptions of maternity and 'motherhood'. I contend that *Confinement* situates Josephy's experience of 'becoming-mother' against the dominant discourses of maternity and birth, and thereby uses the maternal subject as a means to interrogate broader issues of gender and identity.

OPSOMMING

In hierdie tesis ondersoek ek die radikale herberaming van die moederfiguur in *Confinement* (2005 tot op hede) – 'n fotoreeks van die Kaapse kunstenaar Svea Josephy (geb. 1969). Julia Kristeva se teorieë oor die moederlike liggaam, en in besonder die moederliggaam se verhouding tot abjeksie, word aangewend om die verband tussen die liggaamlike en die kulturele te herbedink. Ek ondersoek hoe hierdie fotoreeks Kristeva se konsep van die abjekte benut, ten einde kulturele voorskriftelikheid oor moederskap en 'ma-wees' te ontwig. Ek argumenteer dat *Confinement* Josephy se ondervinding van 'wordend-moederskap' die dominante diskoerse van moederskap en geboorte uitdaag, en sodoende die moederlike subjek gebruik om breër aspekte rondom geslag en identiteit te bevraagteken.

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PREFACE

My interest in maternal representation started as a personal interrogation of my desire to be a mother. At the time this research began, I was childless and increasingly conscious of familial and societal expectation regarding both my reproductive capabilities and presupposed maternal aspirations. Not considering myself to be particularly 'maternally inclined', I was curious as to how and why potential motherhood was seen as integral to others', as well as, to a degree, my own perception of my identity.

During the course of the research, I became pregnant with twins and thus experienced firsthand many of the maternal discourses I address. Initially turning to the usual suspects in terms of information on what lay in store, including popular advice manuals and magazines, I was and still am incredibly grateful to Svea Josephy, who, through our various discussions, and most notably through the images of *Confinement*, gave me a far more *real* account of maternal-becoming. I feel my experience of pregnancy and birth benefitted immensely from these encounters. Notwithstanding the information I gathered, I was still increasingly surprised by the intense physicality of pregnancy, which radically transformed my sense of embodiment and altered my perception of movement and space.

After an hiatus of nearly six months, brought on via the premature birth of my daughters, this thesis has developed alongside my transition into mothering. During this time, I have become increasingly convinced as to the need for a far more complex understanding of the ways in which maternal representation may be negotiated. I hope the work contributes to this dialogue within the growing discipline of maternal studies.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines Svea Josephy's¹ reframing of the maternal body in the photographic series *Confinement* (2005 – ongoing). I propose that through an engagement with the immediate, abject, visceral products of pregnancy and birth, *Confinement* subverts naturalised, hegemonic representations of the maternal 'ideal' to radically undermine conventional representations of maternal bodies in popular culture. I contend that pregnant and birthing bodies trouble conventional modes of subjectivity and are thus a source of tremendous cultural anxiety in contemporary western society² in which the unified, separate, individual, male body forms the normative ideal. For this reason, as I demonstrate in the initial chapters, maternal bodies, and by extension female subjects more generally, have been treated as 'deviant' and are systematically reduced, denied, or disavowed within the dominant patriarchal social frameworks³ that define and determine maternal experience. Josephy's photographs defy the 'silencing' of the maternal that this has effected, reclaiming the morphology of the maternal body and representing it symbolically "as a site of intellectual, cultural, and corporeal creativity" (Kelso 2006: 17).

Since 2005, *Confinement* has in many ways been a continually evolving project for Josephy. Initiated during her pregnancy in that year and continued in the months

¹ Josephy (born 1969) graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art from the University of Cape Town in 1993, and completed a Masters of Arts in Fine Arts at the University of Stellenbosch in 2001, which she obtained with distinction. She holds a Post Graduate Certificate in Business Studies at the University of Wales (2002). Based in Cape Town, Josephy is a senior lecturer in Fine Art (Photography) at the University of Cape Town's Michaelis School of Fine Art. Josephy's work is included in the collection of the South African National Gallery and she has exhibited in South Africa, Senegal, the United Kingdom, Germany, Qatar, Bangladesh.

² I use this term to refer to the social collective of cultures of European origin and their genealogical and colonial descendents. I do not wish to imply that western civilisation is homogenous or unchanging, but use the term as a general reference to indicate those cultures that fall under a westernised sphere of influence regarding social norms, ethical values, cultural traditions, political systems and technologies.

³ The terms "patriarchal" and "patriarchy" are used to infer that within contemporary western society it is male bodies that form the normative standard and structure subjective development, self-other relationships, and dominant power mechanisms. Within patriarchal culture, individualism is valued over relationality as a fundamental aspect of self definition. As Christine Battersby notes, within patriarchal culture, "the ideal adult male self is treated as an isolated and individual unit; one who is above all not to be identified with those appetites and desires that are *merely* bodily, and who is only contingently connected – either by relations of conflict, power or simple aggregation – to other, equally self-contained and isolable selves that are themselves free agents (or 'persons') (2011: 127).

following the birth of her daughter, the series was resumed following the artist's second pregnancy and her son's birth in 2011. The works included in *Confinement* draw on a diverse range of photographic genres and visual styles, as Josephy notes,

Several groups of work constitute *Confinement*, and these include contact prints of my child, Polaroid transfers of images from my pregnancy, documentary photographs and the work presented here⁴. The group of images shown here investigate the immediate visceral products of motherhood, the abject, violent products. These products are indiscreet, full, atavistic: the fluid, blood and tissue (2006: 38).

The arresting photographs within the series draw on notions of unstable identity, relationality and the creative capacities of the mother *and* artist to present an alternative maternal politic from within that embodied state. As Josephy states of the project, "there is no vigilance like the mother's eye ... when it comes to this rite of passage" (2006: 35).

The relation between the bodily experience of maternity and notions of female identity has been highly problematised by feminist avant-garde artistic practise and theoretical analysis⁵. As the reproducer of her own reproduction, Josephy is aware of

⁴ The "work presented here" refers to the images accompanying an article by Josephy on *Confinement* that was published in *Artworks in Progress* in 2006. This thesis covers an analysis of these images as well as others from the series that were obtained directly from the artist, and were not included in the article.

⁵ Although pregnant bodies are no longer taboo in visual arts, their presence therein has historically been limited and remains tentative. Pamela Allara contends that representation of the pregnant body has been "the one subject that was an anathema to feminists, for it threatened to provide evidence for the charge – certain to send women back to their suburban prisons – that 'anatomy is destiny'" (1994: 10). Similarly, in a more recent editorial essay for the online journal *Studies in the Maternal*, Andrea Liss proposes that historically "Pregnancy was viewed as the bastard of motherhood in art; the unwanted, the most taboo. Paradoxically, yet holding the same status, motherhood is too obvious in the sense of being too visible, too seen and thus turned into the obscene. In either case, motherhood continues to be looked upon and looked over as a problem that will not go away, as an embarrassment" (2013: <http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk/editorial.html>). Within the South African contemporary visual arts scene, Terry Kurgan's *Bringing Up Baby: Artists Survey the Reproductive Body* 1998 is one of the few, if not the only exhibition centred on representations of birth, pregnancy, maternity and paternity to have received critical attention. In terms of theoretical writing, Imogen Tyler asserts "There have been few attempts to consolidate interdisciplinary research on the maternal and the Canadian based Association for Research on Mothering (ARM), founded in 1998, [was at the time of writing] the only international feminist organization dedicated to interdisciplinary maternal scholarship" (2008 Online: <http://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/27149/1/tyler-why-the-maternal-now.pdf>). With the introduction of *Studies in the Maternal* in 2009, there are now only two recognised international, interdisciplinary publications focussed on maternal studies.

the challenges posed by this form of fleshy embodiment, particularly apropos the popular (mis)conception of the pregnant subject as mentally incapacitated, by asking “how to be creative at a time when the body has annexed the mind?” (2006: 35). I propose that, by deliberately confronting the “seemingly natural processes” of maternity, Josephy’s photographs use the materiality of the maternal body to interrogate notions of identity and gender in a manner that revalues the body’s cultural contribution, and refigures its relation to subjectivity. In this way, the images reveal how experiences of pregnancy and birth are located at the intersection between the corporeal and cultural, in which the “swelling, bearing and suckling, the flows of blood, semen and milk are constituted and fixed not just by the forces of cultural conception but by coagulation of power” (Jolly in Longhurst 2009: 48). I therefore analyse *Confinement* through a conceptual framework of embodied subjectivity which, following Elizabeth Grosz, “moves [the body] from the periphery to the centre of analysis, so that it can now be understood as the very ‘stuff’ of subjectivity” (1994: ix). In this way, I demonstrate how thinking through the maternal body opens up the possibility of reformulating understandings of selfhood and mind-body relations in a way that “avoids a biological materialism that disregards the effects of culture, and a cultural determinism that neglects the corporal body” (Grosz in Davis and Walker 2010: 457).

Representations of maternal bodies abound in visual culture, ranging from the most sacrosanct, dematerialised portrayals in religious iconography, to overtly sentimentalised depictions, or even their antithesis, the monstrous-maternal of popular media⁶. In the first two chapters I demonstrate how the body that dominates images of ‘motherhood’, no matter how diverse these depictions, is over-coded with suggestions of biological determinism and is largely complicit in patriarchal constructs of ‘essential’ maternity. Further, I argue that these discursive traditions are generally underpinned by binary oppositions that position the body as disassociated from the mind as well as from social and cultural context. I therefore consider how ‘motherhood’ as a cultural construct has resulted in what Adrienne Rich refers to as “the most fundamental and bewildering of contradictions” in that it “has alienated women from our bodies by incarcerating us in them” (1976: 14). This

⁶ See Barbara Creed *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, feminism and psychoanalysis* 1993.

forms an important basis for the premise that *Confinement* is both an intensely personal exploration of bodily and psychological transition, as well as an interrogation of the power structures that shape maternal experience and constrain maternal identity. While the first chapter proposes, broadly and through select examples, the ways in which diverse discourses operate to disavow the maternal body, the second offers a more detailed exploration of pregnancy as a “surveyed and vulnerable body state” (Maher 2007: 23-24) within popular media. This is necessary in light of the proposal that Josephy’s intensive self-scrutiny appropriates this tendency to successfully dismantle the maternal ‘ideal’ in a subversive response to the limitations imposed upon the mother-subject by such representations.

Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theories are of central concern to this thesis since her writing repositions and re-evaluates the role of the maternal subject as a “speaking being” in processes of subjective development. With a particular emphasis on her notions of the semiotic and abjection, the third chapter turns towards psychoanalysis to examine how Kristeva counteracts the essentialist reduction of femininity to “maternity”⁷ by revaluing maternal origin as a fundamental, culturally productive site. By so doing, Kristeva uses the figure of the maternal subject to destabilise prior reductionalist mind/body dichotomies and to extend the way in which meaning is made of human experience. Using “affirmative abjection” as a theoretical foundation, this chapter therefore examines the psychoanalytic and philosophical implications of Josephy’s project, exploring how maternity may be negotiated and represented as a productive site. I take account of criticisms that have been levelled against Kristeva’s abjection as a constructive theoretical resource for feminist analysis, and note that these critiques are based in part on the fear of aligning the female reproductive body to the grotesque⁸. I address these concerns and propose that Josephy’s use of Kristevan abjection is, on the one hand, an attempt to articulate the trauma experienced during childbirth through an identification with her own condition

⁷ Using the example of Christianity’s Virgin Mary as “the most refined symbolic construct” (Kristeva 1986: 161), Kristeva employs the term “maternity” to refer to the way in which femininity is subsumed by maternal function. Sara Beardsworth notes how Kristeva’s attention to “maternity” aims to undermine the opposition between maternity and femininity “that can beset even feminist interrogations of sexual difference” (2004: 264).

⁸ Literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin defined the grotesque as “[That] which transgresses its own body... [A] body in the act of becoming, it is continually built, created and builds another body” (in Allara 1994: 12) – a description easily attributable to the indeterminacy of the pregnant subject.

as 'abject', as well as a more political undertaking of resisting a socially prescribed identity (Menninghaus 2003: 389).

Further relating to abjection, the notions of ambiguity and ambivalence are also explored in some depth. To this end, I utilise Kristeva's attempt to articulate the 'real' experience of pregnancy in "Stabat Mater" (1986) in conjunction with Iris Marion Young's phenomenological account thereof in "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation" (1984) to investigate how portrayals of coherent maternity may be destabilised. I demonstrate how Josephy's images of indeterminate bodily material parallel the ambivalence of maternal experience and the birth process described in these texts.

The final chapter offers a close reading of eight images from the *Confinement* series in which I explore how Josephy subversively uses the visual language of documentary photography together with 'deviant' subject matter to present a "productive alternative visual language" (Josephy 2006: 38) of maternal representation. I consider the ways in which Josephy's images engage with the Kristevan abject to reassert the divided and permeable body of the pregnant and birthing subject - a body that dispels, leaks and transgresses – into the visual frame. Further to this, I analyse some of the images through the lens of the material sublime, which, Rich argues, resonates with the "ancient, continuing envy, awe, and dread of the male for the female capacity to create life" (1976: 21). Via the analysis, I conclude that Josephy's images present a powerful means for re-examining maternity as a progressive force in the reformulation of dynamic identity in contemporary society. The chapter is followed by a brief conclusion which presents the possibilities of further theoretical research that this thesis opens up.

Josephy's photographic work has attracted critical acclaim throughout her relatively young career within the South African visual arts landscape⁹. However, it is her exploration of 'new documentary' forms relating to land and structures in post-

⁹ Josephy was a prize winner at DAKART 2010 9th Biennial of Contemporary African Art, Senegal.

apartheid South Africa that has received the most attention¹⁰, while *Confinement* has yet to be theorised. I therefore introduce this body of work as a necessary contribution to contemporary feminist visions of maternity and maternal scholarship, and propose that the images presented go some way to considering new possibilities offered by the maternal body in explorations of subjectivity, gender and identity. Further, while the Kristevan abject has been widely used as a critical approach within feminist literary studies, its application has been relatively underemployed in relation to feminist visual arts criticism. This thesis therefore offers a constructive contribution to widening encounters between abject criticism and contemporary visual arts practise in South Africa.

¹⁰ See Mulder and Sokoly "Crossing boundaries: contemporary art and artists from South Africa" (2011), Malcolmess "Svea Josphey at Bell Roberts" (2007: <http://www.artthrob.co.za/07dec/reviews/bellroberts.html>), van Robbroeck "Svea Josephy's Twin Cities" (2008).

CHAPTER 1: DISEMBODIED BIRTH

The disavowal of the maternal body

In this chapter, I examine select western cultural discourses which have informed dominant societal perceptions and representations of motherhood and birth¹¹. The chapter is not intended to function as a chronological tracing of western representations of birth, nor does it purport to present a full historical account thereof. Instead, following Imogen Tyler's claim that "birth has been systematically disembodied and appropriated by scientists, philosophers and artists" (2009: 2), I present the most prominent ways in which masculine disavowal of the maternal body has been realised through particular discursive and visual means. I am aware that this requires the oversimplification and decontextualisation of very complex historical discourses, but I do so purposefully to demonstrate how the various diverse areas of investigation operate in discursive formation, to create unifying discourses within particular epistemes. The overall result of this has been the symbolic eradication or silencing of the mother. It is upon this disavowal that theorists such as Tyler, Luce Irigaray, Simone de Beauvoir and Andriana Cavarero claim the majority of western history has been founded (Ludden 2006: 342). Through such an investigation I aim to establish a framework for determining how Josephy's *Confinement* series might be read as a rethinking of birth and the maternal subject. I aim to demonstrate that this series presents a powerful counter-discourse of embodied subjectivity which simultaneously works to reveal the limited visualisation and conceptualisation of maternal subjectivity encoded in phallocentric traditions. By broadening these terms, not only is the "inescapable intertwining of female experience with patriarchal discourse" exposed (Ludden 2006: 342), but an alternative politics and culture of birth may perhaps be proffered.

The discourses which I view as historically causal to the dominant conceptions of maternal subjectivity and visual representations of birth in western society include, but are in no ways limited to, Christian theology, science and medical technology,

¹¹ I have chosen to limit my investigation to western discourse due to the dominance thereof in the production and reception of knowledge globally. Where interesting cross-references to non-western cultural practises can be made I draw attention to these, however I do not wish to make universalised claims across cultures by emphasising their similarities only while negating their sometimes fundamental differences.

mythological tradition, popular media representations, and psychoanalytic theory. Although the significance of the birthing body may indeed be intimated within these discourses, it is most often done in a manner that is not productive for the mother/woman, but rather serves to promote masculine creativity or interests¹² (Ludden 2006: 342). In light of the argument that *Confinement* consciously seeks to disrupt images of idealised maternity within the social imaginary, representations of the maternal ideal perpetuated by the media as well as the media's influence in maintaining normative standards of maternity forms the basis of Chapter Two. Similarly, the relationship between psychoanalytic theory and the formation of the maternal subject as it pertains to this thesis, which includes an analysis of masculine sublimation of the maternal, maternal abjection and the repudiation of the body that births, naturally warrants more detailed attention. I will therefore examine this discourse in greater depth in Chapter Three.

1.1. Bodily maternity in the patriarchal domain

To facilitate a reading of *Confinement* based on “corporeal feminism”¹³ and a reconfiguration of the maternal body, it is imperative to understand the ways in which the indelible association between women and maternity formulates a conception of women as subjects on the basis of sexual reproductive capacity. Reproduction – or more specifically, the ability of women to give birth – is a fundamental signifier by which women are differentiated from men, and is thus profoundly political. Yet this ability has been essentialised to the degree that it establishes “a socially significant

¹² For an interesting analysis of this phenomenon in German literature in particular, see Teresa Ludden's article “Birth and the Mother in Materialist Feminist Philosophy and Contemporary German Texts” 2006.

¹³ In *Volatile Bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism* (1994), Elizabeth Grosz develops this term to refer to a form of feminist theory that bases its account of subjectivity in the body through an inversion of historical binaries and prior dualisms that place the body in a position of subordination to psychical or social significance. In this way, Grosz attempts to use the subject's corporeality as a framework to explain “all the effects of subjectivity, all the significant facets and complexities of subjects” (1994: vii). Through a reconfiguration of the body, “[i]nscriptions and transformations of the subject's corporeal surface” obtain explanatory power in understanding issues of corporeality, sexuality and sexual difference, as well as in remapping what Grosz refers to as “categories of interiority” – agency, reflection, consciousness (1994: vii-viii). Corporeal experiences unique to women, including menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, lactation and menopause, are thus used to reformulate theories of sexed corporeality as well as to “demonstrate, problematize, and transform women's social subordination to men” (1994: viii). This is a particularly pertinent model for an analysis of *Confinement*, a project “marked on the surface and internally through pregnancy and childbirth” (Josephy 2006: 38), which engages with the effects of the body, as a site of both physical transformation and cultural production, on issues of identity and gender.

difference on the axis of sex which is so deeply located in our very sense of lived, sexual identity that it appears to us as natural and unalterable" (Pollock 1998: 33). Within current cultural encodings it is near impossible to extricate women from their reproductive status. As Christine Battersby attests, whether "lesbian, infertile, post-menopausal or childless", women are continually assigned subjectivities that are "linked to a body that has perceived potentialities for birth" (in Tyler 2000: 292). Paradoxically, and rather disturbingly, it can further be argued that it is through women's 'natural' association with the maternal that they have been most effectively silenced. The severe limitations imposed upon or apparent denial of "the signifying space allotted to the mother – the mother as the site of origin" (Grosz 1989: 121), has resulted in an absence of maternal subjectivity throughout much western discourse, and in turn, in the privileging of paternal law and the founding of a "one-sex, one-libidinal economy" (Lawler in Rawlinson et al 2011: 15). Much of French feminist Luce Irigaray's philosophical concerns have centred on this 'matricidal' basis of western patriarchal culture¹⁴. Writing on the exclusion or relentless erasure of the maternal from philosophical discourse she states:

In order to become men, they continue to consume [the mother]... draw on her resources and, at the same time, they deny her or disclaim her in their identification with their belonging to the masculine world. They owed their existence, their body, their life and they forget or misrecognise this debt in order to set themselves up as powerful men, adults busying themselves with public affairs (in Grosz 1989: 121).

Locating the maternal body as the "primary locus of signification and relationship... the condition for the creation and nourishment of life" while emphasizing its undoing within western thought, Irigaray argues that this body is "taken to be matter subordinated to the regularity of nature" (Rozmarin 2012: 7). By allocating homogeneity and naturalness to 'motherhood', while simultaneously denying the debt all humanity owes to maternal origins, women's desires and, crucially, women's bodies as culturally productive entities are conceptually obliterated from western thought, which continues to treat birth from an exclusively masculine perspective

¹⁴ A more detailed explanation of Irigaray's matricidal concerns appears in my discussion of maternal disavowal and psychoanalysis in the following chapter.

(Lawler in Rawlinson et al 2011: 15, Irigaray in Betterton 2006: 291). In line with this view, Serene Khader contends “The prevailing genealogies in contemporary Western culture emphasize the contributions of fathers, whether human or heavenly, in the production of human culture. The masculine sex establishes itself as the origin of all value through such genealogies” (in Rawlinson et al 2011: 2).

1.2. Divine motherhood: Western theological conceptions of the maternal

Death by Eve, life by Mary.

(22nd Epistle of St. Jerome in Tumanov 2011: 507).

The definition of women based on essential maternity is most clearly articulated in the representations of western theology, both Protestant and Catholic doctrines, which has historically been a major force in proliferating popular conceptions of femininity as well as legislation and ritual surrounding birth. As Deborah Sawyer notes, “The characters, the setting and the events played out in this [theological] narrative have been a constant identity reference for Western, colonial and postcolonial cultural consciousness and unconsciousness” (2008: 313). The archetypal female figures of the Virgin Mary and Eve can be seen to exemplify the Church’s ambivalent position regarding the maternal subject, in which the dualism of idealisation and contempt are most evidently realised through the body of the birthing woman. Either revered as a sacred ideal of perpetual virginity or abhorred through the association of sexuality, shame and sin (Ludden 2006: 344), the maternal body has been wholly appropriated by theological discourse, “presenting humanity with goals of perfection and depths of imperfection, influencing the very notions of self and desire” (Sawyer 2008: 305). Referred to as the Madonna-Whore dichotomy in Evolutionary Psychology, the conceptual framework of female behavioural extremes presented within the Christian rhetoric is, as Sawyer affirms, deeply “embedded in western culture and, by transference, in colonial contexts around the globe”¹⁵.

¹⁵ Sawyer proposes that the influence of Christianity’s traditional female archetypes “ultimately eludes theological revisionism” and remains profoundly relevant despite the continued secularization of religious studies in the twentieth century: “we see, after all, Eve’s bitten apple engraved in every iPod across the globe” (2008: 305-306). Similarly, Vladimir Tumanov illustrates the prolific “imposition of the Madonna-Whore template on women” through the numerous

Described by Kristeva as “one of the most powerful imaginary constructs known in the history of civilisation” (1986: 237) and “the most refined symbolic construct in which femininity is focussed on Maternity”¹⁶, the Virgin Mary is the ultimate idealised figure of the maternal. If one examines the foremost teachings surrounding Mary - her Immaculate Conception, The Annunciation and Incarnation, and The Assumption - it is evident that the three areas of human life which it could be argued are the most carnal, the most essentially bodily or vividly physical – birth, sexual reproduction and death – are all wholly negated within these narratives. Following the prominence of these events in her life and the focus given to them in theological doctrines, Sawyer attests that “Mary’s body is privileged over any other aspect of her being” (2008: 306), yet it is an unmistakable paradox that this body simultaneously transcends all major forms of material corporeality. I will therefore explore each of the narratives briefly to demonstrate how the Madonna exists in a realm which completely counteracts any possibility that *embodied* maternal subjectivity could be revered. Her “uninterrupted state of perfect purity” (Sawyer 2008: 308) is instead venerated as a complete and contained contradiction to the open, porous fluidity and distinct physicality of the pregnant and parturient subject, presenting a “great and unchallengeable model” for all Christian mothers (Clark 1973: 576).

As expounded in Catholic doctrines, Mary was the product of the Immaculate Conception of Saint Anne, which located her from the outset in an earthly position “full of grace” (The Bible, Luke. 1:28) and thus prevented the hereditary transmission of sexual sin¹⁷. According to Sawyer, early Christian theologians (most notably

examples of female opposites apparent in literature, opera, film and other cultural manifestations which view women within “the framework of this either-or sexual taxonomy” (2011: 518).

¹⁶ Kristeva uses the term “maternity” to refer to the problematic reduction of femininity to the maternal, representing “masculine appropriation of the Maternal” (1986: 236). “Maternity” thus refers to the process by which maternal power is tamed through an act of appropriation, one that she sees as integral to masculine sublimation. According to Kristeva, this has resulted in either a complete rejection of motherhood by radical, avant-garde feminism, or in the general acceptance of its traditional representation (Söderbäck 2010: 4).

¹⁷ It would seem this claim has been a contentious one throughout the history of the Roman Catholic Church. However a position was officially reached and defined in 1953, articulated in Pope Pius XII’s *Fulgens corona*, which elucidates Catholicism’s view of the scriptural basis of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception (Bristow, 2003; Most 1994). An official statement of the doctrine reads, “...the blessed Virgin Mary to have been, from the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Christ Jesus the Saviour of Mankind, preserved free from all stain of original sin.” This doctrine is a formal one in the Roman Catholic Church only and is rejected by Protestantism. It is in relation to Mary as a divine subject of worship that Protestantism and Catholicism differ, with the Protestant Church rejecting this thesis outright. Schooled in Catholicism, Kristeva seemingly follows this view, referring to Mary’s “miraculous or ‘immaculate’ conception by Anne and Joachim after a long childless marriage” in *Stabat Mater* 1986.

Augustine of Hippo) emphasised sexual intercourse as originating in concupiscence or strong sexual lust. Through this extreme form of desire, a link was established between procreation as the ‘origin’ of life, and the ‘origin’ of the human community brought about via original sin, “made manifest in the world through Eve’s offer of the forbidden fruit to Adam” (Sawyer 2008: 306). In this manner, the generation of human life is necessarily tainted with the stain of the corrupt and sinful nature which followed mankind’s acquisition of carnal knowledge. As Hélène Cixous comments, “Every entrance to life finds itself *before the apple*” (in Sawyer 2008: 313). Owing her existence to Immaculate Conception however, Mary is able to avoid this tarnish. Her “uniquely sinless position”, as referred to by Grosz (1989: 93), is instituted not as a result of her own actions, but because she was not originally conceived within a state of sin. This forms a fundamental basis for the continued desexualisation of the maternal in the Catholic “cult of the virgin” (Bolous Walker 1998: 137, Grosz 1989: 83). As Vladimir Tumanov notes, the Church’s radical stance or “obsession” with virginity has become “so pervasive over the centuries after Christ that one can view it as the virtual hallmark of the entire religion”¹⁸ (2011: 511).

The desexualisation of the maternal is plainly upheld in the Annunciation, by which, as passed down from mother to daughter, Mary herself becomes the passive recipient of the Holy Spirit and conceives via God’s intervention in a miraculous, non-biological manner¹⁹. With her asexual, virginal state remaining intact throughout maternity and the act of giving birth to Jesus Christ, traditional teaching thus

Other scholars, finding no scriptural basis for this claim, argue that Mary’s conception was brought about in the normal way but are in agreement that by God’s sanctifying grace she was preserved from the stain of original sin and the corrupt nature it necessarily brings (Brom 2004: <http://www.catholic.com/tracts/immaculate-conception-and-assumption>).

¹⁸ Ute Ranke-Heinemann has written extensively on the history of women, sexuality and the catholic Church, noting how for Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, St. Augustine and others, sexual contact with women was condemned as “the source of all evil” (Tumanov 2011: 511). St. Augustine in particular viewed virginity as “morally higher than marriage with sex” (Ranke-Heinemann in Tumanov 2011: 511), eventually leading to the institutionalised celibacy and “vitriolic misogyny” of the Catholic Church (Tumanov 2011: 511).

¹⁹ Although sometimes mistakenly referred to as the Immaculate Conception, this act is known as the Incarnation (Clark 1973: 576). Interesting parallels can be drawn to the miraculous, non-biological conceptions of deities in non-western religions of Buddhism and Hinduism. Within Buddhist teaching for example, Buddha is conceived immaculately during a dream experienced by his mother, Queen Maya, in which a white elephant enters her side allowing Buddha to descend from one of the heavens into her womb. The Queen thus awakens from the dream to find herself impregnated. Queen Maya later gives birth to Buddha from her right hip, a further unnatural manner. In Hinduism, Brahma, who is considered to be the creator, is shown in popular iconography as emerging from a lotus flower protruding from the bellybutton of Vishnu, another (male) Hindu deity (Holm 1994: 72). From these examples, it would seem that a common thread exists in that the birth of supernatural or divine beings rests on the denial of normal conception, and specifically, a denial of the ‘natural’ processes of the maternal body.

presents Mary, although impregnated, as remaining whole and impenetrable. Her maternity is a complete contradiction to the permeable, divided, leaking fluidity of the earthly parturient subject. In repressing the carnal knowledge that the mother's body is necessarily a sexual one, the maternal is emphatically privileged over women's sexuality. The cult of the virgin can thus be seen as "an attempt to smooth out and cover over the contradictory status and position of maternity in the symbolic, a maternity both 'respected' and unrecognised, both sexless and fully eroticised" (Grosz 1989: 83). As Della Pollock explains, the fact that the pregnant body is a sexual one, the swollen belly declaring "this woman has had sex" makes "the conspicuous alignment of sexuality with maternity vexing for a Western Judeo-Christian culture". Thus, due to the havoc it wreaks "on a clear divide between the sacred and the profane[,] maternity must be purged of sexuality... because we cannot tolerate their confusion" (1997: 35-36). The deep-seated, universal split between the wholesome, asexual mother and the threatening, sexualised woman denigrates maternal sexuality to the perverse. As Sha and Kirkman note, the mother as a sexualised being is one that suggests moral failure and invites societal condemnation (2009: 362)²⁰. The sexualised pregnant woman therefore embodies a cultural taboo, fundamentally opposing the representation of the 'virgin mother'. Further to this, Mary's own miraculous existence is in fact only validated in relation to her maternal role, thereby sanctioning the position of women as submissive mothers over any other subjective desire. With her own subjectivity defined solely by the product of her perfect son, Mary becomes what Kristeva terms the 'Christly Mother', referring to the "masculine appropriation of the Maternal" (1986: 163) by which "her bodily maternity is lost, subsumed into the masculine godhead" (Sawyer 2008: 310).

²⁰ Annie Leibowitz's controversial *Vogue* magazine cover image of a naked, heavily pregnant Demi Moore sparked moral outrage due to the apparent sexual allure of Moore's pose and gaze, notwithstanding her embodied state. In anticipating a fervently negative public reaction to the image, *Vogue* produced specialised packaging to cover Moore's naked body. However, retailers remained undecided whether to place the magazine within the general interest or pornographic section of their newsstands, while others withdrew it from shelves completely, indicative of the enigmatic position of the sexualised maternal as an unresolved space or indeed abhorrence within patriarchal society. My reading of the image is however in agreement with that of Imogen Tyler's article "Skin-tight: Celebrity, Pregnancy and Subjectivity" 2001 in that the specific photographic rendering of Moore's marbleised, flawless skin still denies cultural imaging of pregnancy as open, porous and undifferentiated. Clothed in her own skin, Moore too becomes an impenetrable, indivisible, discrete surface, her skin a "visual immune system against the penetrable gaze" (Tyler 2001: 119). In this way she therefore retains a sense of "wholeness" and "virginity".

Additionally, Christian teaching stresses Mary's effortless carrying of Christ in the womb and her lack of pain in the actual labour process, evident in the passage: "Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child" (The Bible, Isaiah. 66:7). The significance of Mary's painlessness is apparent in its stark contrast to the suffering and pain of Eve, foretold in Genesis 3: 16, which is interpreted as punishment for her transgression: "God said to woman Eve, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy pain in childbearing. In pain thou shalt bring forth children and thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee"²¹. Again, it is due to Mary's own immaculate birth as free from original sin that she is able to be liberated from Eve's, and hence womankind's, destiny to suffer (Sawyer 2008: 308). While on the one hand Mary seems to reconcile the "apparent contradiction of true virginity with equally real motherhood in the one person" (Clark 1973: 576), it can equally be argued that the impossibility of emulating Mary's maternal example conversely positions all maternal subjects firmly as "daughters of Eve", with female sexuality and powers of reproduction viewed alongside notions of imperfection, contamination and punishment.

Embodying threatening sexuality at its most destructive and uncontrollable, Eve's role in the narrative of creation and the subsequent conception of feminine subjectivity cannot be overestimated (Sawyer 2008: 312, Bolous Walker 1998: 136). As Grosz puts it, "Two sides of the same coin, Mary and Eve, represent woman as the coupling (for man at least) of sexuality and death: in the case of Eve, the temptation of Adam, the expulsion from Eden and the mortality of humans are the consequence of Eve's 'wayward desires'" (1989: 83). As the perpetrator of original sin, Eve is not only solely to blame for women's pain in labour but also for man's mortality. As well as being precluded from the suffering of childbirth, Mary, however, is immortal; she does not die but rather, in both body and spirit, is 'taken' to heaven via the Assumption²². In this way, the purity of her body is not compromised by the impurity of death (Oliver in Curtin & Heldke 1992: 75).

²¹ As Alan Clark points out, while the reason why Mary did not suffer pain has remained unclear throughout historical theological study, the affirmation of her giving birth without pain is constant (1973: 583).

²² Referring to Mary being bodily assumed into Heaven, the full title given to the event is 'The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven'. Within the churches that observe the Assumption, it is formally celebrated on 15 August.

It is perhaps not surprising, as Robyn Alexander points out, that “the Christianity-inflected connotations of a fall from grace (or, ‘The Fall’, after which woman receives her due punishment)” use the same verb as the South African colloquialism ‘to fall pregnant’” (1998: 5). This, along with menstruation and the pain of labour as the ‘Curse of Eve’, is the negative outcome of devious feminine sexuality and the submission to temptation. For this reason, as Weissler explains, much historic ethical literature, written by men, treats women’s reproductive capacities in mythic terms, emphasising menstruation as symbolic of Eve’s legacy of punishment. He notes, “Thus, women’s very bodies give evidence against them as murderers once a month; the implication also seems to be that because of Eve’s sin, all women are ‘naturally more sinful than men’” (Weissler in Eiberg-Schwartz 104)²³. Similarly, relating to childbirth in particular, Sawyer explains, “the dangers [the birthing woman] encounters and the pain she suffers are the authenticating signs of her and womankind’s estrangement from God” (2008: 308). It is for this reason that anaesthetic was historically not administered to women in labour²⁴ with the physical reliving of this separation from God historically positioning parturient women ‘outside’ of the church (Sawyer 2008: 308).

The until fairly recently practised Christian rite of “churaching” new mothers stands as an interesting contradiction to the apparent privileging of women’s maternal role over any other aspect of female subjectivity, since it presents maternal subjects with a double bind in which the very process of becoming a mother is associated with the adulterated²⁵. A ritual of purification closely resembling baptism, churaching was

²³ This may also provide a basis for the blatant double standards regarding sexual behaviour historically evident in legal code. For example, under Napoleonic Code adultery was viewed as a crime only committed by females (Miller in Tumanov 2011: 509).

²⁴ Although ether anaesthesia was widely accepted in surgical practise from 1846 onwards, Jacalyn Duffin describes how the use of anaesthesia on mothers in labour was met with “staggering resistance not only out of concern for the infant, but for a philosophical reason: doctors, clerics and other authorities believed that women were meant to suffer pain in childbirth” (1999: 256). Citing Genesis 3: 16, the Church of England prohibited the use of anesthetic in childbirth, describing it as “the manifestation of God’s punishment for the ‘original sin’ of carnal knowledge, which, as it happened, was also the ‘original cause’ of labour itself” (Duffin 1999: 256). It was only after the obstetrician Dr John Snow was invited to administer chloroform to Queen Victoria, who as British monarch was also head of the Church of England, for two of her deliveries that the use of anaesthesia during parturition became more accepted.

²⁵ Although this rite is not commonly practised within western Christianity nowadays, Sawyer notes how its inclusion has survived all major prayer book reforms and, as an example, can be found in the 1979 version of the *American Prayer Book* as well as in the *Alternative Service Book*. The Church of England’s *Book of Common Prayer* contains a liturgy for the ritual entitled “The Order of the Purification of Women” (Sawyer 2008: 307). The churaching of women after childbirth is still performed in Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Eastern Catholic churches.

traditionally treated as a “ceremony of restoration and cleansing after the impurity and sequestration of childbearing” (Cressy 1993: 109). As Sawyer explains, “The symbolism and sacred actions of the rite of churching women would seem to reflect the notion that these women, through the process of giving birth, have somehow moved out of their baptized state” (Sawyer 2008: 308). It was therefore only after undergoing the ceremony of churching that new mothers were again allowed to partake in the sacraments of the Church and to return as a member of the congregation. According to David Cressy, the focus of the ritual was almost penitential, “a reflection of the endemic mistrust of woman-kind” (1993: 109). As women are intrinsically identified by their capacity for childbirth and as the dangerous daughters of Eve, “[c]hurching is presented as a classic *rite de passage* dealing with female pollution, as a cultural response to the fear of women, and as a man-made instrument for their control” (Cressy 1993: 109)²⁶. Cressy’s choice of the word ‘pollution’ alludes to Mary Douglas seminal work *Purity and Danger* 1966, in which she examines symbolic rituals associated with dirt and pollution. Douglas uses the term ‘ritual pollution’ within the religious system to denote a state of uncleanness derived from contact with a dirty activity, object or person. Dirt, in turn, is defined as “disorder” or “matter out of place” (Douglas in Callaghan 2002: 9), which functions at two levels, both as a danger to society and as a source of power. To associate the act of giving birth with that which is dirty, impure or able to defile, the continued control and containment of the body that births has thus historically been justified through acts such as religious ritual and patriarchal control. The implication for women however is paradoxical, as maternity is both privileged over other aspects of subjectivity yet is simultaneously an activity that leads to an association of impurity and has been used to justify patriarchal dominance and misogyny.

It is also worth noting how the language of descendent lines throughout both the Old and New Testaments further entrenches masculine appropriation of maternal origins. Passages such as “Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat

²⁶ Rather than viewing the ritual of churching in terms of gender conflict and sexual politics based on its association with purification, writers such as Susan Wright argue that for many women it was a time of social celebration, “a collective female occasion, and the conclusion to the privileged month that women normally enjoyed after childbirth” (in Cressy 1993: 110). Be this as it may, however, the theoretical reasoning behind the ritual still stands. For an historical analysis and in depth insight into the ritual, see Cressy’s article “Purification, Thanksgiving and the Churching of Women in Post-Reformation England” 1993.

Judas and his brethren" (The Bible, Matthew. 1:2) are a clear example of "the implicit denial of female involvement in the reproductive process [by which] men appear to generate progeny on their own" (Tumanov 2011: 511). Similarly, drawing on Michelle Bolous Walker's reading of maternal silence as a disavowal and oppression of the maternal body, Julie-Anne Kelso analyses the use of the Hebrew verb "to give birth" within the extensive genealogies included in the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles. Her finding is that it appears in masculine form ninety-one times, compared to a meagre seventeen times in the feminine. She thus concludes, "the dominant phantasy, here in the genealogies, is the phantasy of mono-sexual, masculine (re)production" (in Sawyer 2010: 477). Such genealogies are important indicators for determining how the values of our present culture came to be, as well as revealing the underlying motivations for the positioning of the maternal subject therein²⁷.

Although it is indisputable that the historical circumstances in which dialectical oppositions such as the Madonna-Whore dichotomy originated no longer apply to women in contemporary society, who are afforded far greater control over their freedom and sexual activity, the disembodiment of the maternal evident in Christian discourse forms an important historical basis for the continued privileging of paternal law, which keeps motherhood in the patriarchal domain. As Kelso again notes, "[t]he association of women with maternity, along with the disavowal and the repression of the maternal body as 'origin' of the masculine subject, effects and guarantees the silence of the feminine, enabling 'man' to imagine himself as sole producer of his world" (in Sawyer 2010: 477).

1.3. Maternal absence: Scientific visualisation and the medicalisation of pregnancy and birth

The increased visibility of the biological processes of pregnancy in society today, made possible through various advances in medical imaging technology, has been interpreted by many feminist critics as negatively impacting the autonomy and individual experience of pregnant women (Maher 2007: 19). While claiming science

²⁷ Tumanov's article "Mary Versus Eve: Paternal Uncertainty and the Christian View of Women" 2011 presents the interesting view that male anxiety stemming from paternal uncertainty and the resultant genetic risk of extinction is at the heart of the desire to control all aspects of female sexuality.

to be an 'objective discourse', medical imaging, such as ultrasound and enhanced foetal photography in particular, has effectively evacuated the subjective experience of the mother by focussing almost exclusively on 'foetal personhood'. To this end, as Julie Palmer elucidates, "the pregnant body is erased – both literally and discursively – from mainstream foetal representations" (2009: 93). Further, the medical fraternity has been especially effective in constructing a distinctively sanitised view of both the maternal body and the specific act of birth. I will therefore deal with these two aspects in turn, firstly examining the exclusion of the mother from foetal imaging and as a discursive subject of gestation, followed by a discussion of the sanitisation of the maternal body and "taboo aesthetics of the birth scene" (Tyler and Clements 2009: 134). I will thereby illustrate how each contributes towards a political aesthetic of the pregnant and birthing woman.

From its earliest imaging in diagnostic sonography, it can be argued that the foetus is presented as a complete subject, developing within the confines of the 'receptacle' of the maternal body rather than as an entity-in-process reliant on a deeply relational resource (Kaplan 1992: 204, Maher 2002: 96). Within the frames of this mode of visualisation, distinctions between mother and child are determined from the outset. The apparatus of ultrasound technology operates by bouncing sound waves off dense matter; what is revealed is therefore a "series of absences and presences operating together to construct a particular image" (Maher 2002: 99). In this instance, the maternal space of the mother's body, the very source of the developing foetus within, is figured as 'absence' or negative space. Outlining the foetus thus necessitates an erasure of the pregnant woman with the result that this form of imaging largely ignores the interconnectedness or relational nature of the entities within the maternal body²⁸. As Maher contends, "Rather than a clear vision of the multiple and entwined body/subject exchanges that are irreducible in pregnancy, the deployment of visual readings confirms the singularity and divisibility of the foetal

²⁸ It is this aspect of sonography that has prompted feminist theorists such as JaneMaree Maher and Julie Palmer to examine the place of the placenta in prenatal ultrasound imaging, both of whom advocate for the significance thereof as a material and social point of connection to be acknowledged. The distinction outlined in technologically produced images of pregnancy is rejected by these theorists. This view is vital to keep in mind for the analysis of Josephy's photograph *Placenta* (2005) in Chapter Three, in which I contend that the object of the placenta offers the artist means to access a form of productive or active engagement with the birth experience as well as a means by which to revalue a sense of embodied maternal subjectivity.

and maternal entities” (2002: 98). This extends to discursive practise surrounding such imaging techniques. For example, in “The Placental Body in 4D: Everyday Practices of Non-Diagnostic Sonography” 2009, Palmer explores the commercial practice that has developed out of this technology, in which internal maternal physiology is often positioned as an “obstacle to a clear view of the foetus” (2009: 71), explained or referred to as something to be deleted or ignored before focus returns to the foetal subject²⁹. Aspects of maternal anatomy can literally be eliminated from the image using both the ultrasound technology itself and photo-editing software. By so doing, “pregnant women’s bodies are erased to make way for the [other] one true person – the fetus” (Clarke in Tyler 2000: 299). The pregnant belly is thus visually coded to always primarily signal to the foetus as ‘subject within’, that “discrete and separate entity, outside of, unconnected to, and, by virtue of its ostensible or visual independence, in an adversarial relationship with the body and life upon which it is nevertheless inextricably dependent” (Hartouni in Tyler 2000: 299). Pregnant embodiment is thus little more than an unacknowledged visual frame.

The increased presence of foetal representations in the public domain has prompted feminist theorist Barbara Dunden to consider it “one of the most recognizable and potent symbols of modern culture” (in Maher 2002: 98). She is however critical of this new-found attention, viewing it as a threat to the autonomy and bodily integrity of the pregnant woman:

How did the unborn turn into a billboard image and how did that isolated goblin get into the limelight? How did the female peritoneum acquire transparency? What set of circumstances made the skinning of women acceptable and inspired public concern for what happens to her innards? And, finally, the embarrassing question: how was it possible to mobilize so many women as uncomplaining agents of this skinning and as willing

²⁹ The use of this medium for non-diagnostic purposes has initiated the rise of private commercial centres that produce DVDs of cinematic footage of life in the womb (to which soundtracks are added) for expectant parents. As Tyler comments, the availability of such graphic visualisations of life before and during birth may indeed suggest an important historical or psycho-social shift. She states, “It’s not simply that representations of birth have increased and changed, but the fact that so many kinds of representations of birth are now possible. In the context of a history in which birth was unrepresentable and unknowable, the *possibility* of visual cultures of birth is perhaps symptomatic of new forms of natal politics” (2009a:4. Emphasis in original).

witnesses to this haunting symbol of loneliness? (Dunden in Maher 2002: 98).

The paradox represented by Rosalind Petchesky in *Fetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction* 1987 highlights the problem of making sense of feminist critiques of ultrasound technology when women generally find ultrasound examination a pleasurable, intimate experience. As Palmer insightfully articulates, “the fact that this tension remains unresolved perhaps reflects the ambivalence inherent in pregnant subjectivity, which is not easily simplified to a question of one or two subjects of gestation” (2009: 76).

The visualisation of pregnancy within medical discourse is closely aligned to perceptions of objectivity and scientific ‘truth’, particularly regarding representation or the image as a form of knowledge gathering. Medical technology’s visual invasion of the mother’s body has become a key facet of contemporary science’s management and control of the pregnant subject through the ‘authority’ attributed to such forms of signification (Maher 2007: 26, 2002: 100). Pregnant women are thus effectively pathologised as ‘patients’ with a specific ‘condition’ requiring treatment; their “unruly reproductive bodies” converted to a “legitimate object of medical and scientific scrutiny, amenable to containment and control” (Ussher in Fox et al: 2009: 556)³⁰.

Within a Foucauldian framework of *biopolitics*, the increasing surveillance of maternity can therefore be read as a form of neo-liberal governance³¹. Foucault

³⁰ Davis and Walker explain how, within the historic pathologising of women’s bodies based on specific biological functioning (such as menstruation, pregnancy and menopause), female organs such as the uterus and ovaries were considered to be the cause of certain disease states, such as hysteria (2010: 459).

³¹ Foucault used the term biopolitics to indicate the manner in which power has transformed itself to be exercised on the body through disciplinary procedures in various fields of intervention across populations, with a goal to further the technologies of capitalism. Mark Coté elaborates on how Foucault identified *biopower* as a form emergent since the end of the eighteenth century in the wake of the inadequacies of sovereign and disciplinary power. Foucault uses sexual health and early epidemiology as early examples of population management, as opposed to punishment carried out on individual bodies. Biopolitics is deployed through various biopowers, for example, the management of health, diet, fertility and sexuality (Coté 2007: <http://www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/the-labor-of-the-multitude-and-the-fabric-of-biopolitics>). As Antonio Negri explains, “This is a productive form of power relations that ‘manages’ populations... in a ‘preventive fashion’ to maximize their productivity” (in Coté 2007: <http://www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/the-labor-of-the-multitude-and-the-fabric-of-biopolitics>). In Foucault’s terms, “biopower uses populations like a machine for production, for the production of wealth, goods, and other individuals” (in Coté 2007: <http://www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/the-labor-of-the>

emphasizes the increasing power that medical or technological ‘wisdom’ exerts in society as scientific ‘truth’ or ‘fact’, which becomes internalised as a specific form of social control to which many women submit willingly. As Nicolson explains, women “internalise dominant discourses and actively engage with the medicalization of their own pregnancies” (in Fox et al 2009: 557). The ‘necessity’ of medical intervention therefore becomes naturalised as an effective disciplinary measure, the power of which lies in the willing, or desired, submission of individuals to it. The increased medicalisation of pregnancy therefore disempowers women who, instead of depending on their personal experience and decision-making ability, submit to increased, arguably unnecessary medical control, surveillance, and intervention. This is further evident in the diminished role of midwifery, a position historically occupied by women, which is increasingly substituted for intervention by the medical fraternity³².

The sanitisation of the parturient body evident in medical discourse is again reflective of particular power relations and practises prevalent within distinctly westernised birth experiences. The increased involvement of healthcare professionals in natality has arguably played a large role in the association of birth processes and products with that which is contaminated or unclean. Helen Callaghan contends that following the discovery of germ theory in the nineteenth century³³, the focus of healthcare rituals and practises on that which is unaesthetic, unhygienic and pathogenic has created a close association between processes of birth and dirt (in Kirkham 2007: 12)³⁴. In this instance, Callaghan once again draws on Douglas’s definition of ‘dirt’ as not necessarily referring to a material ‘thing’, but to that which has been rejected by

multitude-and-the-fabric-of-biopolitics). Related to this, Foucault’s theory of the hermeneutic of the self refers to various institutional disciplinary strategies, such as the “confessional”, which operate through normalization to the point that individuals become so inculcated by them that they become self-policing subjects (Rabinow 1991: 87).

³² I use the term “fraternity” deliberately to refer to the medical profession which, for various historic and socio-political reasons, is still dominated by men.

³³ In medicine, the germ theory of disease refers to the discovery that some infectious diseases are caused by the presence and actions of micro-organisms within the body. The theory was developed and gained wider acceptance in Europe and the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, superseding miasma and contagion theories of disease. It brought about major innovations in sanitation in medical settings and aseptic surgical techniques, and remains a guiding theory underlying contemporary biomedicine (Available: <http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/techniques/germtheory.aspx>).

³⁴ Callaghan uses the term “birth dirt” to describe “the theory which explains the power and/or dirt relationships in childbirth”. She notes, “Birth dirt exists, but its nature will vary depending on the time, the place and the culture” (in Kirkham 2007: 8).

various symbolic systems due to its conceptual relation to matters of hygiene, etiquette or aesthetics. Although the association of birth to issues of sanitation has undoubtedly positively influenced maternal and infant mortality rates through an increased understanding of infection and contagion, Callaghan suggests that the “ritualised behaviours of containing, controlling and cleaning up” (2002: xv) the ‘dirt’ associated with the physical reality of childbirth, has created a barrier in the power relations between healthcare practitioners and parturient women, between the ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’. In this manner, the healthy maternal body is inexorably pathologized. This has further undoubtedly influenced visual strategies of birth, in which the ‘birth dirt’ is very rarely included in representations of either the actual birthing process or newborn babies.

Numerous medical procedures associated with the cleansing of the maternal body and the newborn child exist, with ‘dirt’ in this instance most often relating the ‘contaminating’ body fluids and substances derived from the woman and her newborn (although it is worthwhile to note that the material related to the baby is most often seen as emanating from the mother’s body). Babies are always born wet and may additionally be slippery due to the greasy vernix³⁵ which covers them, while urine, faeces and bloody mucus may simultaneously be present. Further, the baby may excrete meconium, a “thick, sticky, dark greenish, black, tar-like substance” (Callaghan in Kirkham 2007: 14). For this reason, it is usual medical procedure for newborns to be wiped clean or wrapped in cloth directly after birth, before being returned to the parents to hold or touch. Further, the actual fluids present in birth can themselves be hierarchically organized according to the degree of ‘abject-ness’ with which they are associated, based on their intrinsic properties. As Grosz states,

These body fluids have different indices of control, disgust and revulsion... Those which function with clarity, unclouded by the spectre of infection, can be represented as cleansing, and purifying: tears carry with them none of the disgust associated with the cloudiness of pus... the stickiness of menstrual blood (1994: 195).

³⁵ Vernix Caseosa is a thick, white waxy substance which coats the baby *in utero* to protect their skin from amniotic fluid and to help facilitate passage through the birth canal.

For both Jean-Paul Sartre³⁶ and Douglas, the status of polluting fluids is allied to their viscosity as well as their bodily functions. Genital excretions and those related to procreation are far thicker, stickier and slimier than fast-running tears, for example. As Callaghan again argues; “because of women’s different anatomy and physiognomy, including the ability to give birth, and therefore, the ability to produce body products such as menstrual blood... lochia, liquor, colostrum, that are also unique to women, they are considered dirtier than men” (2002: 357)³⁷. The implicit association of the more viscose fluids with femininity and childbirth is thus a clear one, resulting in the ordering of liquidity extending to the social positioning of women in general and parturient women in particular. By taking on different sociological and psychological status, these “polluting fluids that dirty the body” so intrinsically linked to women’s corporeal flows, and which can be seen to reach their peak of uncontrollability in pregnancy and childbirth, have certainly contributed to the “misogyny that characterises western reason” (Grosz 1994: 3)³⁸. This has been reinforced by medical discourse’s emphasis on these fluids as disorder, pollutants or hazardous contaminants to be effectively controlled and disposed of.

Besides the fluid substances that accompany delivery, every birth has additional by-products, most of which are defined by the medical system as ‘clinical waste’³⁹. Like dirt, these waste products signal a site of possible danger to individual and social systems, due to their marginal, unincorporable status (Grosz 1994: 192). Traditionally within a western paradigm, the placenta, as that which sustains the relation between the maternal subject and the foetus, is considered to have a

³⁶ Sartre analyses his own extreme distaste for and horror of viscous fluids in *Being and Nothingness* 1956, in which he associates sliminess and stickiness with the fear of femininity, “the voraciousness and indeterminacy of the *vagina dentate*” (in Grosz 1994: 194). For a more detailed explanation, see Elizabeth Grosz’s *Volatile Bodies* 1994.

³⁷ Irigaray similarly view fluids related to birth as emblematic of femininity. In *This Sex That is Not One* (1985) and *Marine Lover* (1991), she refers to amniotic fluid as that which continues to be a “watermark” etched on the child’s body, “a recall of what is most archaic in me, the fluid. That through which I have received life, have been enveloped in my prenatal sojourn, have been surrounded, dressed, fed in another body” (Irigaray in Grosz 1994: 104-105).

³⁸ I discuss the fluids most associated with abjection and provide detailed analysis of Kristeva’s use of Douglas’ work on pollution within the sphere of psychoanalysis and subjectivity in Chapter Three.

³⁹ In South Africa, clinical or “health care waste” may be defined as “any undesirable or superfluous by-product, emission, residue or remainder generated in the course of health care by healthcare professionals, healthcare facilities and other non-healthcare professionals, which is discarded, accumulated and stored with the purpose of eventually discarding it” (2008:http://www.hpcs.co.za/downloads/conduct_ethics/rules/generic_ethical_rules/booklet_16_booklet_on_the_health_care_waste_management.pdf).

specific timeframe attached to its utility. Once this function has been brought to a close with the birth of the infant, the placenta becomes known as 'after birth', that which must be expelled from the body before being classified as waste material. In most circumstances it is therefore disposed of by the institution concerned⁴⁰. Like menstrual blood, the viscosity of the liquid found on the placenta is thicker than normal blood and often contains clots and body tissue. This places it further within the category of 'indeterminate' substance and the abject, resulting in its being perceived as 'dirtier' than ordinary blood. Images of placentas are extremely rare compared to those of other human organs. This could be indicative of the overwhelmingly male-dominated production and reception of knowledge within our current discursive field, within which the placenta has undoubtedly been 'othered'. As a temporary organ that develops within the time of gestation only, the placenta is further unique in that it consists of both a foetal component, developing from the cells that form the foetus, and a maternal component, which develops from maternal uterine tissue. In this way, as Maher notes, the "porous and pliable nature of the boundaries that are at once enacted and disavowed in the placenta mark a subjective framing that does not depend on the figure of one, or even two. Rather... these figurations are expanded and reformed" (2002: 97). Such articulations of subjectivity indeed seem absent from visualisations and discourses on pregnancy within a patriarchally dominated society, which "recognise[s] value only in the subjectivity of a sovereign individual" (Shildrick 2010: 1, Maher 2002: 102). The placenta and body which produced it thus openly contest the "masculine principles of individuality, non-contradiction and singular temporality [that] still underpin basic understandings of subjectivity" (Tyler in Ahmed et al 2000: 289).

Despite the increasing visibility of depictions of birth in popular culture, it has been argued that the majority of images proliferate a political aesthetic which 'others' the act of birth. In many such representations, the birthing mother is reduced to an "abject-object" rather than "active subject" (Tyler 2009a: 4). Callaghan contends that although the exposure of woman's birthing bodies has increased in medical textbooks and childbirth manuals for example, these often take the form of clinical

⁴⁰ Many non-western cultures have a vastly different approach to what is considered 'waste' material relating to birth, with the placenta in particular being treated as something sacred, often requiring specific burial rites. Examples of this practise can be found in African, Islamic, Aboriginal, Maori and Navarjo cultures, among others. Within western medical contexts, patients are asked to sign a consent form for the disposal of the placenta, which is referred to as "human tissue" and most often incinerated.

drawings in which women and their bodies are radically “segmented, magnified, isolated and objectified” (2002: 334). Further, the vast majority of images in popular and medicalised material obscure the actual moment of birth itself, particularly in vaginal births in which the placement of attendants and clothing impede this climactic instant. As Clements maintains “in medical texts, the photographs [are] cropped tightly on a draped body. They show... hands working on someone inanimate. Somewhere above a pubic bone or between the legs scissors cut open a space” (in Tyler and Clements 2009: 135). Commenting on the distinction between visual representation of vaginal and Caesarean births, which are by contrast found to be far more graphically depicted, Tyler and Clements note, “It was as though vaginal births were pornographic, in need of censorship” (2009: 135)⁴¹. In order to protect the ‘modesty’ or privacy of the birthing woman within these images, exposed breasts and genitalia seemingly remain taboo due to the discomforting conflation of maternity and sexuality⁴². The birthing body is additionally mediated through specific visual means, such as the physical setting and positioning of the labouring woman in relation to the camera, which almost always creates a viewpoint from the (male, medical) attendant’s perspective, not the mother’s.

The sanitisation of birth in medical discourse extends to the use of language surrounding particular birthing processes. While the phrase ‘to give birth’, which is directly aligned to ‘natural’ or vaginal birth, denotes an active involvement on the part of the maternal subject, it is not a phrase used in relation to Caesarean section, which in turn, is arguably the most extreme example of medical intervention in parturition. Instead, in this instance the infant is ‘delivered via Caesarean’, which, as Tyler and Clements attest, is “understood visually as a medical intervention, which the woman *receives*” (2009: 135). Images of Caesareans commonly show women as

⁴¹ Lori Shor draws an interesting analogy between the construction of the female body in instructional childbirth videos and in pornography. Drawing parallels between filmic footage of hospital births and typical techniques of pornography she notes how within both genres almost no shots exist in which the exposed vagina and woman’s face are included in a single frame. She states, “This type of framing of the different female body parts and the editing together of these images would seem to make the viewer see the ‘subject’ of this film as ‘object’... This use of montage on the labouring woman’s body also allows the viewer to disassociate the female face from the female vagina, thus avoiding sexual difference on a personal level” (1992: 7).

⁴² The sexual component of childbirth is emphasised by many authors, including Raphael-Leff 1991; Rich 1976; Kitzinger 1985; and Odent 1984. In the article “Youtube: a new space for birth?” Robyn Longhurst comments on the furore surrounding a proposal by a woman known as ‘Nikki’ to give birth for a pornographic film (2009: 93).

physically restricted by being kept on their backs and anaesthetised, their bodies strapped with foetal monitor belts, while intravenous tubes and other chords entangle their limbs and oxygen masks often cover their mouths. The mother is thus reduced to an entirely passive role afforded her within this birth experience, represented as being bound, immobilised and cut, while the (traditionally male) doctor is credited with 'bringing' the baby into the world (Shor 1992: 5) ⁴³. In this way, the maternal subject is both visually and discursively silenced, asserting a view of the body as an object to be acted on, rather than an acting subject (Shor 1992: 4).

With the ever-increasing medicalization of pregnancy and birth, (especially considering the growth and development of reproductive technologies such as artificial insemination, *in vitro* fertilisation, and surrogacy, among others), maternity and the role of the maternal subject has undoubtedly been radically redefined as women's reproductive capacity has been turned to the service of legal, social and economic institutions (Maher 2007: 21). Removed of bodily autonomy and defined by stringent disciplinary regimes imposed upon it, the maternal body has become "public property, open to societal judgement" and official control (Fox et al 2009: 563). Moreover, cultural historian Barbara Stafford insists that reproduction itself has been progressively transformed to become part of the "textualized and symbolized world of duplicable or disposable goods" (in Allara 1994: 30). Medical and scientific representations of pregnancy can therefore be seen to disavow the maternal body in an ever more extreme manner, underpinned by a lack of cultural value attributed to the pregnant woman as a subject of gestation. As Pamela Allara contends, "current technologies provide not only for sex without reproduction... but reproduction without sex. For better or for worse, the scientific establishment has now rendered moot the

⁴³ In the article "Mater of Fact: Alice Neel's Pregnant Nudes" 1994 Pamela Allara briefly traces a history of the taboo of childbirth images within popular visual culture of twentieth century America. Referring to a photograph by Wayne Miller *Birth* ca. 1955 included in the 1955 Museum of Modern Art exhibition "Family of Man" she notes, "In this mid-fifties homage to the mythologies of Western European culture, childbirth was imagined as a masked doctor-magician triumphantly pulling a male child out from a pile of sheets like a rabbit out of a hat. If the photograph's point of view resulted in a distortion of the physical facts, its author, Wayne Miller, perhaps more accurately than he knew, nonetheless pictured the delivery of childbirth into the hands of institutionalized medicine. By obliterating the woman's body, Miller provided a documentary record not of childbirth but of patrimony: in a patriarchal culture, it is men who, historically, bear children by giving them a name and more recently by managing their biological processes through technology" (1994: 15).

question of subsuming female identity under maternity... In medical and legal terms, it is men who have babies” (1994: 30)⁴⁴.

1.4. Of myths and matricide: Masculine parthenogenesis and power of male cultural production

Give or take a few additions or retractions, our imaginary still functions in accordance with the schema established through Greek mythologies and tragedies... And what is now becoming apparent in the most everyday things and in the whole of our society and our culture is that, at a primary level, they function on the basis of a matricide (Irigaray in Rawlinson et al 2011: 13).

The eradication of the maternal body from processes of conception and parturition is certainly not unique to the western cultural imaginary of the late twentieth century. By contrast, “the history of philosophy and literature is littered with male births... in which birth is imagined as a masculine or divine act of creation” (Tyler 2009a: 1). The principles expounded in mythological narratives, including male procreation, have been a rich and limitless resource for western cultural studies across disciplinary fields⁴⁵. Further, many of the cultural traditions from which these myths emerge have played a foundational role in the formation of our current socio-symbolic organizations, within which the maternal subject is positioned. As suggested by Della Pollock, cultural narratives function as “sites of reflection, critique, self-making, self-theorisation and collectivization” (in Battersby 2006: 293), in other words, performative utterances through which identity is brought into existence⁴⁶. It is

⁴⁴ The issue of legislation as it relates to reproduction is perhaps most publically evident in abortion debates, within which “cycles of activism, violence, changes in medical practise, and legislation continue to work in complex relationship to each other” (Ginsburg 1998: ix). Although a detailed explanation of the abortion issue is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worthwhile to note that legal control of women’s bodies, which is intrinsically related to mechanisms of power, forms one of the central social conflicts of contemporary society.

⁴⁵ For examples of male procreation in the visual arts, one only has to look as far as Michaelangelo’s famous Sistine Chapel painting *The Creation of Adam* ca. 1511 or Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus* 1485 illustrating the birth of Venus (Aphrodite) from the contact between Uranus’ semen and the sea, arguably two of the most recognized works in the western Renaissance canon.

⁴⁶ Judith Butler employs this theory in her formulation of gender as a performative utterance in that it constructs what it names through a ritualised repetition of norms. She notes, “Gender is a repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory framework that congeal over time to produce the appearance

therefore telling, following Christine Battersby's view, that "what has been effaced from the history of culture [is] not the processes of birth ... but those processes as located in a female body" (2006: 296).

The "matricidal impulses of Western thought" (Sandford in Chanter 2001: 185) can perhaps be seen to find their origins in the Orestes myth, as dramatised in the only surviving Greek trilogy, the *Oresteia*⁴⁷, and the myth of Zeus and Metis which precedes the events of the *Oresteia*⁴⁸. For this reason, my investigation focuses on these narratives, although numerous other examples of maternal disavowal can no doubt be found within mythological traditions. This forms the basis for examining the elevation of the male in cultural production and the transcendent capacity ascribed to masculine figurative birth.

On the most basic level, a dominant principle expounded by the *Oresteia* is the advancement of systems of litigation over acts of personal revenge⁴⁹. This is exemplified when the goddess Athena, who establishes the first court of democratic justice, is called upon to cast the deciding vote in the trial of Orestes for matricide. Athena sides with Orestes thereby absolving him of his crime, giving the following reason:

of substance, of a natural sort of being" (1999: 33). She explains how femininity – and here I would like to suggest patriarchal conceptions of maternity too – are "not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment" (in du Gay et al 2005: 111). This view is of course indebted to Foucault's understanding of discipline as a mechanism of power which regulates the behaviour of individuals in the society (O'Farrell 2007: <http://www.michel-foucault.com/concepts/index.html>). Performativity, as described by Butler is "a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'; further, what is 'performed' works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable" (in du Gay et al 2005: 112).

⁴⁷ Written by Aeschylus, the play was originally performed at the Dionysia festival in Athens in 458BC. In the article "Towards a Structural Theory of Matricide" 2004, Amber Jacobs uses the Oresteian myth as a means to subvert the hegemony and dominance of the Oedipal patricidal model in psychoanalytic theory. Importantly, Jacobs presents the Oresteian structure not as the antithesis or opposite of the Oedipal, but as "a structural constellation alongside Oedipus that signifies another field of desire producing alternative systems of meaning", through which to theorise the place of the mother within the symbolic order (2004: 20).

⁴⁸ By including the myth of Metis, I follow the argument presented by Jacobs in which she necessitates for a reading of the Metis myth in order to fully uncover the latent content of the *Orestia*. It is however significant, as Jacobs notes, that Metis is not represented nor mentioned in any way in the tragedies of Aeschylus (2004: 24).

⁴⁹ For a more detailed reiteration of the myth's narrative structure, see Jacobs 2004.

Orestes,
I will cast my lot for you.
No mother gave me birth.
... with all my heart I am my Father's child
(Aeschylus in Jacobs 2004: 24).

As Jacobs explains, in order to understand the gravitas of Athena's public denouncement of maternal origins, another matricidal crime, that of Metis, Athena's own mother, must be investigated. In a very brief summary of the myth, Metis, the goddess of crafty thought and wisdom, becomes pregnant after being raped by Zeus. Fearing a prior prophecy that Metis would bear children more powerful than the sire, Zeus then swallows the pregnant Metis in order to evade the prophecy and access her wisdom and knowledge. Subsequently, Zeus is overcome by an excruciating pain in his head, which finally splits open to reveal their child, Athena, who springs forth. This gives rise to the idea of birth as the gift of male gods or 'Zeus-given' (Arendt in Tyler 2009: 2). Metis meanwhile is never heard of again, being assimilated into Zeus' stomach lining, thereby forever denying the maternal body as origin. Importantly, Metis is never killed, but is rather incorporated by Zeus. Emma Whiting thus asserts "This is why her loss is never recognised, mourned or given symbolic representation (introjected) and so never generates the guilt or fear of punishment that would institute and perpetuate maternal law. Consequently, no limit is imposed on the male's... (imaginary) belief in omnipotence, giving free reign to his parthenogenic phantasy" (2009: 343).

The fantasy of male parthenogenesis is as such embodied by Athena who, as a "motherless" daughter, affirms her father as the prime author of her identity and functions entirely within paternal structures, exemplified within the court of justice she assembles. Jacobs explains, Athena "will represent this [paternal] logic and will devote her work to endorsing and institutionalising it as law in her court of 'justice'" (2004: 25). She continues, "The fantasy of male parthenogenesis becomes the entrenched fantasy around which the paternal law is organized" (2004: 32). As Cavavero points out, it is further poignant that within the complex narrative of the *Oresteia*, it is a female voice that is used "to expound the philosophical discourse of a patriarchal order that excludes women, ultimately reinforcing the original matricide

that disinvests them” (in Sandford 2001: 194). Through her own declaration, Athena disavows the maternal body and declares her loyalty to Orestes and patriarchal law. With no mention made of Metis within the *Oresteia*, the link between the two matricidal crimes is effectively severed, as, like Metis’s body, her story is wholly concealed or incorporated by another. Through the act of repression, “the myth of Metis functions like a ‘silent substratum’ of the *Oresteian* situation” (Jacobs 2004: 24, 26). In this way, it is Zeus’ parturition of his daughter that has received by far the most attention in cultural receptions of Athena, while her conception is rarely referred to.

The subject of matricide has been a significant topic of address in psychoanalytic theory. Freud, Irigaray, and Kristeva, along with Melanie Klein, Christina Weiland and Andre Green, have all engaged with it via readings of the *Oresteia*. Freud in particular took considerable interest in Athena, referring to a bronze figurine of her within his cherished collection of ancient statues as his favourite, describing her as “perfect” (in Jacobs 2004: 27). Further, in the ‘Rat Man’ case, Freud declares:

A great advance was made in civilisation when men decided to put their inferences upon a level with the testimony of their senses and make the step from matriarchy to patriarchy. The prehistoric figures which show a smaller person sitting on the head of a larger person are representations of patrilineal descent: Athena had no mother, she sprang from the head of Zeus (in Jacobs 2004: 26).

As expressed through Freud’s admiration for Athena and the implied repression or disavowal of her genesis within Metis through the words “Athena had no mother”, the unacknowledged role of the maternal body becomes a recurrent feature throughout psychoanalytic theory. In her critique of this omission, Irigaray has thus insisted that the female body should not “remain the object of men’s discourses or their various arts but that it [should] become the object of a female subjectivity experiencing and identifying itself” (in Battersby 2006: 293). This concern will be addressed further in the following subsection.

Returning to the *Oresteia*, the emergence of Athena from Zeus' head, as opposed to any other body part, is in itself worthy of consideration. Following the long-standing dichotomous opposition between mind/body, women's capacity to give birth has resulted in a consistent positioning of the female subject as allied to nature and matter, and by extension all further subordinated terms which are thereby representationally aligned⁵⁰. Within the case of male parturition however, it would seem the association is more obscure. By reinforcing Athena's birth from Zeus's *head* – the place of the mind, where faculties of reason, judgement and consciousness reside – the animality of the coupling of birth and the body can be seen to be transcended. Although he has 'given birth', Zeus thus retains his psychic 'integrity', as the intrusion or interference of the body (of the female Athena) is literally expelled through his mind, or from his consciousness. He therefore does not experience the kind of social devaluation linked to the birthing body, and can retain his status as an all-powerful, masculine deity. By attributing the masculine body a unique form of corporeality in this way, the powers of reproduction no longer serve to render the subject "vulnerable, in need of protection of special treatment, as variously prescribed by patriarchy" (Grosz 1994: 13). Instead, these characteristics remain wholly within the domain of the 'feminine', entrenching a view of women as "somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men" (Grosz 1994: 13). Conceptions of the female body are thus not malleable in the way that men's are, through which their "corporeal specificity is used to explain and justify the

⁵⁰ Grosz explains how within such dualisms, the terms are always polarized and hierarchized, with one primary term privileged over its 'other'; the suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart which is expelled from or partly defined as a lack with respect to the first. The concepts are thereby understood as separate, distinct and isolated entities. Grosz thus notes how the mind/body opposition has always been "insidiously" correlated with other oppositional pairs, which act as lateral associations that have a homologous hierarchical logic and are interchangeable, at least in certain contexts. Following this view, the term 'body' becomes associated to that which is non-historical, naturalistic, organistic, passive, inert, and *female* (1994: 3, 4). Seen as an intrusion on the mind and as something requiring transcendence, the body is thus coded by terms that are themselves devalued (1994: 4). Further, by associating women and the feminine with the body, irrationality and emotion, while aligning men and masculinity to the mind, control and reason, the body, bodily sensations and corporeal experiences are themselves discounted as sources of knowledge, as are women as 'knowers' (Davis and Walker 2010: 458). As Young states, the discursive application of such value-laden dichotomies thus has "practical effect in personal lives, workplaces, media images, and politics, to name only a few social fields" (2005: 5). It is on this matter in particular that vehement 'egalitarian feminist' opposition to the essentialist equating of femininity with maternity based on biologism has been expressed, with proponents arguing that "women's reproductive capacity is the lynch pin of female oppression, the anchor which has precluded women from cultural production and its associated value systems" (Stabile in Tyler 2000: 292). Such feminists have therefore criticised what Judith Butler describes as "the compulsory obligation on women's bodies to reproduce" (in Söderbäck 2010: 1).

different (read: unequal) social positions and cognitive abilities of the two sexes” (Grosz 1994: 14). By implication then, even in the process of parturition men continue to be unhindered by or perhaps are rather able to overcome or control the irregularities and unpredictabilities of the body, making them capable of wholly separate achievements. Whereas birth is represented as a limitation which binds women’s bodies to nature, thereby denying them access and rights to positions of active production within patriarchal culture, in the case of male genesis, it becomes that by which the potential for acts of genius is demonstrated through the transcendent capacity of masculine production as an act of reason.

In her account of gender and genius within cultural evolution, Christine Battersby explores how the veneration of male self-birth was exemplified in the idea of the male genius during the era of Romanticism. She notes, “At its most extreme Romanticism required the genius to conceptualise himself as male mother. References to birthing and to a kind of psychic pregnancy were common” (2006: 295). Birth, in this instance, refers to a kind of cultural or intellectual renaissance, conceived via the productive labour of man’s own intellectual creativity⁵¹. As that which “alters both man and his external world [in] a process that involve[s] man actively fashioning himself, as a self-creation” (Marx in Bolous Walker 1998: 86)⁵², the transcendent and creative capacity of masculine production is thus extended to

⁵¹ It is however interesting to note, as Battersby points out, that although the Romantic concept of genius was distinctly sexed as necessarily biologically male, such figures were also “described in terms that appropriated characteristics that had formerly been regarded as stereotypically *feminine*”. She explains further, “The male genius was praised for such characteristics as an excess of imagination, sensibility, sympathy, emotion, irrationality and even ‘madness’. The male genius *transcended* normal masculinity, rendering himself symbolically ‘feminine’” (2006: 295). Once again, such conceptions foreclose man’s debt to the maternal body and deny any form of productive embodied maternal subjectivity. Women, on the other hand, could not be described as genius, whether they displayed feminine or masculine traits. As Cesare Lombroso bluntly explains, “There are no women of genius; the women of genius are men” (in Richardson 2007: 231)

⁵² This idea resonates with Marx’s phallogocentric economic theories, so fundamental to contemporary capitalism and models of production. In decisively positing value in ‘masculine’ production over ‘feminine’ reproduction, by which man’s productive power over nature relegates women to a dominated essence, a clear division of labour is presented. As Margrit Shildrick explains, where the former signals “proliferation of difference, a dynamism and vitality... Reproduction on the other hand is mere repetition in the sense of iteration of sameness – ‘in the father’s image’ is the trans-historical trope – and a certain kind of stasis” (2010:4). Reproduction, as a feminine capacity, reduces women to her body which is devalued as a material support for culture and society only. As Marx notes regarding the power of masculine production however, “The whole of what is called history is nothing but the creation of man by human labour, and the emergence of nature for man; he therefore has the evident and irrefutable proof of his self-creation, of his own origins” (in Bolous Walker 1998: 87).

man as self-generating. Once again, this entails a complete foreclosure of the maternal body.

The metaphor of an intellectual or spiritual pregnancy is one that echoes Plato's writing in *The Symposium* in which he states,

Those whose procreancy is of the body turn to woman as the object of their love, and raise a family, in the blessed hope that by doing so they will keep their memory green... But those whose procreancy is of the spirit rather than of the flesh... conceive and bear the things of the spirit... Wisdom and all her sister virtues (Plato in Mullin 2002: 28).

Within this comparison, Plato clearly ascribes a higher spiritual and cultural significance to masculine intellectual birth over feminine physical or material birth. This view is taken even further in Nietzsche's fairly prolific use of metaphors of birth and spiritual pregnancy, in which it is indicated that only those incapable of physical birth, in other words, men, can achieve such heights. As Mullin elucidates, "for Nietzsche, a woman who experiences bodily pregnancy fulfils all of her desires and exhausts all her psychic energy, leaving her neither the desire nor the ability to be intellectually or artistically creative" (2002: 29). This is evident in statements such as "when a woman has scholarly inclinations there is usually something wrong with her sexuality. Unfruitfulness itself disposes one to a certain masculinity of taste" (Nietzsche in Mullin 2002: 29).

Mythological narratives and the consequent fantasy of male parthenogenesis which arise from them can thus be seen to perpetuate the phallocentric desire to situate the maternal subject "outside culture" (Battersby 2006: 307). By reinforcing the patriarchal scheme of representation that divides the mind from the body, women's bodily pregnancies are presented as, at best, intellectually or spiritually insignificant, devalued, if not wholly omitted from the realm of cultural production.

Further to this, the relationship between mythology and psychoanalytic theories of the subject, and the grounding of sexual difference therein, is pronounced, evident in

the writings of both Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung⁵³. With narratives of Oedipus and Narcissus so intrinsic to Freudian theory and myths forming the basis of Jung's theory of archetypes and the collective unconscious, it is perhaps not surprising that mythology was one of the first cultural fields, along with literature and art, to be explored through applied psychoanalytic principles. Nadia Sels proposes that the two fields in fact resemble one another as she states, "both disciplines deal with the irrational, both work with stories, and both have to do with interpreting metaphorical language" (2011: 57). With Freud's notorious correlation of Medusa's head to the horrific sight of (castrated) female genitalia⁵⁴, as well as the abundant themes of incest, parricide and gendered monsters, the relationship between mythology and the patriarchal, phallogentric ideology of psychoanalysis, as a highly influential system of knowledge regarding subjectivity and sexual difference, is worth noting.

1.5. Maternal ambivalence: Philosophy, psychoanalysis and the sublimation of the maternal body

The women's body, with its potential for gestating, bringing forth and nourishing new life, has been through the ages a field of contradictions: a space invested with power, and an acute vulnerability; a numinous figure and the incarnation of evil; a hoard of ambivalences (Rich in Bolous Walker 1998: 151).

A paradigmatic case of "breached boundaries" (Shildrick in Callaghan: 309) and indistinction, a group precariously located on the margins, parturient women have been a fundamental and bewildering contradiction to the western philosophical focus on autonomous individuality. Writing of her own experience of pregnancy, Imogen

⁵³Although the two theorists had a profound influence on one another, with Freud referring to Jung as his "adopted eldest son", "crown prince" and "successor", it has been argued that Jung's divergent attitude towards mythology in particular eventually drove the two apart (Pint in Sels 2011: 58). As Sels explains, "Instead of seeing psychoanalysis as the one and ultimate key to the question of mythology, Jung came to see psychoanalysis as the youngest branch of the old mythological tree, as just one more way of telling stories about the images that had occupied humanity ... Freud could not forgive this defection, which he saw as a betrayal of his theories of psychosexuality; he interpreted Jung's attitude as yielding to repression" (2011: 59).

⁵⁴ A detailed investigation into the relationship between mythology and psychoanalysis as it pertains to sexual difference is not included in this thesis. For further analysis see Bowers *Medusa and the Female Gaze* 1990, Creed *Horror and the monstrous-feminine: An imaginary abjection* 1986, and Albrecht *The Medusa Effect: Representations and Epistemology in Victorian Aesthetics* 2009.

Tyler observes, “My pregnant body is a sign of contestation. It defies a certain logic and a present form... there is no predicate, no I, no model of the subject available, no position, for want of singularity, my monster, myself, can take up to speak this embodiment” (in Ahmed 2000: 289, 291). The body of the pregnant woman defies stable classification under patriarchal systems, producing “chaos and confusion in a culture of individuals. As the antithesis of the individual and unable to be constrained by forms of singularity, maternal embodiment disrupts the dichotomies of subject/object, self/other. Tyler therefore recognizes it as “a topology which remains unmapped, unthought, indeed unthinkable, within a philosophical landscape of stable forms”. She continues, “I want to laugh and laugh as I face the sheer abyss that divides my-self, pregnantly embodied, and the paradigms of self available to me to speak from in the scene of representation in which I find myself and in which I am not for I am not one” (in Ahmed 2000: 209). Similarly, Iris Marion Young contends that pregnant embodiment is a state of consciousness that “challenges the integration of my body experience by rendering fluid the boundary between what is within, myself, and what is outside, separate... The birthing process entails the most extreme suspension of the bodily distinction between inner and outer” (1984: 276).

From the very outset western philosophy can be seen to have established itself on profound somatophobia⁵⁵ (Grosz 1994: 5). In the *Cratylus*, for instance, Plato maintains that the word *body* (*soma*) originates from the word for dungeon (*sēma*), used by Orphic priests to describe how man, as a psychic, non-corporeal being, was confined within material form as though imprisoned. From its earliest imaginings, the body is therefore regarded as an imposition or restriction to the operations of reason and intellect. Plato extends this concept within his doctrine on the Forms, in which matter is viewed as a “denigration and imperfect version of the Idea”, making the body “a betrayal of and a prison for the soul, reason, or mind” (Grosz 1994: 5). Arguably one of the most excessive manifestations of bodily confinement, it is perhaps not surprising that Plato denigrated the mother figure to little more than a receptacle, referred to as *chora*; “an invisible and formless being which receives all

⁵⁵ Fear or hatred of the body, the body is seen as the source of all the undesirable traits. Grosz maintains that this feature, which has been inherited through our received history, remains significant in current conceptions of bodies (1994: 5).

things... and is most incomprehensible”⁵⁶ (Plato in Bolous Walker 1998: 13). In *Volatile Bodies*, Grosz observes how Plato “believed that the mother provided the formless, passive, shapeless matter which, through the father, was given form, shape and contour, specific features and attributes it otherwise lacked”, prompting her to note how consequently “[t]he binarization of the sexes, the dichotomisation of the world and of knowledge has been effected already at the threshold of Western reason” (1994: 47).

Although contained and immobilised within these descriptions, the maternal body simultaneously posed the threat of unconstrained fluidity and corporeal disorder which masculine consciousness had to prevail over or sublimate in order to control⁵⁷. That the masculine fantasy of self-birth co-exists with a latent fear of maternal power is a well-theorised contention. Bolous Walker (1998: 65) for example, explains how within Plato’s cave (as philosophy’s womb), the excessive possibilities of this voluminous space and its potential to overflow needs to be constrained in order for the subject to break free from and to avoid being swallowed by “the corporeal abyss from which [he was] formed” (Grosz 1992: 198). Similarly, in her criticism of masculine sublimation of the maternal in *Tales of Love* 1987, Kristeva contends that “Phallic power would in short begin with an appropriation of archaic maternal power” (in Söderbäck 2010: 4). She thus further asserts, “it is this power, a dreaded one that patriarchal affiliation has the burden of subduing” (in Bolous Walker 1998: 65). It is therefore both through acts of containment of the materiality of the maternal body, as well as masculine appropriation of potential maternal power through metaphors of male gestation, self-genesis and intellectual rebirth, that women are effectively silenced within philosophical discourse. Owing to this, as Page duBois notes, “philosophical reproduction is ascribed exclusively to men who will inseminate each

⁵⁶ A more detailed explanation of Plato’s use of the term *chora* together with Kristeva’s retheorisation thereof follows in the next chapter.

⁵⁷ According to Jeffrey Adams, Freud “appropriated the idea of sublimation for psychoanalytic discourse to signify the transformation of lower sexual instincts into higher, culture-building activities” (2006: 688). Whereas repression is a defence mechanism which erects barriers against the *id* thereby inhibiting *ego* growth, sublimation presses *id* impulses into the service of cultural achievement. The term is therefore apt in this context to describe masculine sublimation of the maternal through which male cultural production is again privileged over female material reproduction.

other with ideas in a sexual act in which women are excluded” (in Söderbäck 2010: 13)⁵⁸.

In Plato’s *Timeus* we read of men’s intellectual journey as a “deliverance from their bonds and the curing of ignorance” (in Bolous Walker 1998: 183), with the philosopher acting as an obstetrician who extracts the subject from the prison of the cave/womb. Irigaray argues how this journey is described as a movement away from the immanence and corporeality of the mother towards the transcendence and spirituality of the father; “a steep rocky ascent along which an obstetrician and then a philosopher teacher have dragged the child, the adolescent, the young man, [which] ends at last in the crowning glory of the Idea” (in Bolous Walker 1998: 15). She criticises this phallogentric foundation which forecloses all maternal involvement, particularly the role of the mother’s body, in the subject’s intellectual and cultural becoming. As Grosz notes, “Irigaray claims that masculine modes of thought have performed a devastating sleight-of-hand: they have obliterated the debt they owe to the most primordial of spaces, the maternal space from which all subjects emerge, and which they ceaselessly usurp” (1995: 121). Through their persistent intent to give birth to themselves, Irigaray claims that men not only refute the mother as woman, but “disavow even that limited, metonymic, signifying space allotted to the mother – the mother as the site of origin” (Grosz 1989: 211). It is thus via the violent and systematic erasure of the contributions of women, femininity and the maternal, that the male constructs of a cultural environment, an intelligible universe, the creation of ‘true knowledge’, and philosophy itself transpire (in Grosz 1995: 121).

It is within Freud’s development of the Oedipal complex that repudiation of the mother’s body finds its most eloquent expression. As the central founding theory of psychoanalytic models of the subject, it can be argued that the Oedipal complex perpetuates the matricide underlying western culture through the persistence of a masculine genealogy that refuses to acknowledge the original source of the maternal body. His near silence on maternal value has led theorists such as Collins et al to

⁵⁸ One such example is Plato’s reference to Socrates as an intellectual midwife. In *Theaetetus* Plato uses this metaphor to explain how Socrates’ teaching can help at the “birth of knowledge”, in other words, he assists men in their search for truth, which already exists within them, and which they need to give birth to themselves (Söderbäck 2010).

question whether his “occulting of the mother” in the Oedipus complex could be viewed as “the manifestation in him of a perversion – repression of the mother – which lies at the root of Western civilisation itself?” (in Bolous Walker 1998: 51).

According to Cheryl Lawler, Freud “kills by omission of any reference to the first object as being of any significance other than as that amorphous, fusion chaos against which the struggling ego must assert itself with the help of the Oedipal father ... if it is to become a subject” (in Rawlinson et al 2011: 15). The maternal subject is thus relegated to “a pre-subjective, antisocial order” (Rozmarin 2012: 7) referred to as pre-oedipal. Within this ‘non-subjective’ position, maternal desire exists only in relation to the father, and reference to maternity is reduced to the daughter’s repressed desire to bear her father’s children. Further, relating to the subject’s castration anxiety as the impetus for separation from the mother’s body within the Oedipal drama, the mother’s castration or lack is a powerful reminder of paternal authority⁵⁹. The (boy) child instinctively renounces the mother’s body at the horrific discovery of her castration. This founding moment is seen as the subject’s “greatest cultural achievement”, by which he resolves his own enigmatic, physical birth through a form of rebirth as a subject of individual being (Freud in Bolous Walker 1998: 51). In erasing all debt to the role of the mother, Freud thus presents maternity and female sexuality within a wholly patriarchal framework.

The pattern of male sublimation of the maternal is repeated in the work of Jacques Lacan, who reiterates a phallogocentric appropriation of origins through identification with the Name-of-the-Father. Standing between the newly emerging subject and its desire to return to the maternal body, the Name-of-the-Father as symbolic paternal law is a generative power, sustained through the subject’s desire for the phallus and

⁵⁹ Castration anxiety, according to Freud, is the ordering principle of sexual development. The boy child connects ownership of his penis with the presence of his father and, as the marker of sexual difference, with masculine power. Biological differences between the sexes are seen in relation to a fear of castration, with ownership of the penis the only guarantee of power, order and stable identity. This situates the female body as a site of lack (castrated) – an ever-present threat which becomes repressed into the subject’s subconscious. Whereas this model is applicable to boys only, girls experience a slightly different version within which, seeing herself as already castrated, the girl child seeks a substitute for the lost penis in the form of a baby which she imagines she receives from the father (Mansfield 2000: 32-33). Objecting to the ‘anatomy is destiny’ universalising features of the Oedipus complex, feminists such as Irigaray and Grosz have identified these models with the construction of discriminatory gender values and politics in western society (ibid: 34).

to occupy the position of the imaginary father⁶⁰. This developmental process of subject formation is therefore once again predicated on a foreclosure of the maternal body (Shildrick 2010: 4)⁶¹. Only through the intervention and authority of the father (Freud), or the phallus (Lacan) by which the maternal order is disavowed, can the developing subject enter the Symbolic as a coherent, intelligible subject. These influential models therefore entirely exclude the mother-subject from the processes of individual subjective and cultural development. As Lawler explains,

In this economy, women can become subjects of desire by abnegating their position as embodied women (Irigaray 1985b); they can 'function' as maternal vessels, or finally, become commodified as objects of (male) desire (Irigaray 1985b, 1993b). In none of these positions is woman able to set a limit to phallogocentric-shaped psychic desire. A third term is required precisely because the mother is not a subject in her own right and therefore cannot initiate the child into culture (in Rawlinson et al 2011: 15. Emphasis in original).

As mere 'object' of the infant's desires, or passive container for the subject within her, the mother-subject is rendered largely absent from any creative role within psychoanalytic theory. The resolute denial and sublimation of the maternal forecloses the possibility of framing maternal subjectivity as a productive, generative force.

1.6. Conclusion

Sanctified yet disavowed by religion; pathologized and marginalized by medicine; erased by myth and wholly foreclosed from philosophy, it is clear that the maternal

⁶⁰ It is important to note, though, that Lacan recognises the phallus as a potent signifier which determines the entire symbolic order as masculine. The symbolic phallus therefore extends Freud's Oedipal theory away from its literal, biological base of desire for the father's penis, and acknowledges, thereby, male domination as a social reality.

⁶¹ In Lacan's theory the Name-of-the-Father is the law of the symbolic governed by the phallus, the "transcendental signifier". It facilitates the subject's entry into language and thus socialisation through an identification with and desire for the symbolic position of power and control occupied by the imaginary father through language. The imaginary father, as the mother's other and that which she loves, is whom the subject wishes to be - he is the pivot around which the beginnings of self and other are constituted through a renunciation of the mother and entry into the paternal symbolic realm (de Nooy in Lechte and Zournazi 2004: 123-124).

body is a site of potent repression, sublimation and contestation. Theorists such as Irigaray and Kristeva thus argue that for the development of the mother-subject within psychoanalytic discourse, creating the space for an economy of creative exchange with “at least two” positions (Irigaray in Rawlinson 2011: 14), the role of the maternal subject in shaping both the psychic structure of individuals and of culture requires a different framework of embodied subjectivity to be developed within a new politics of maternity.

“Simultaneously one and two, intimate and public, hidden and on display, the maternal body occupies a site of multiple interest and investments for the individual and for the collective” (Betterton 2010: 3). In the subsequent chapters, I aim to explore how theorist (Kristeva) and artist (Josephine) alike have disrupted the metanarrative of patriarchal traditions, in which “every utterance, every statement is ... developed and affirmed by covering over the fact that being’s unseverable relation to the mother-matter has been buried” (Irigaray in Tyler 2009: 1), in order to reclaim the maternal subject. I shall investigate how the maternal *body* in particular has been used as a tool for resignification, resulting in a destabilisation of symbolic norms and the articulation of an alternative identity; a subject “independently embodied” while at the same time “one that fundamentally disturbs the model of the disembodied unitary self of western logic” (Betterton 2002: 266).

By reconfiguring the maternal body outside or beyond patriarchal logic, I shall attempt to reveal how a more diverse, plural and inclusive representation of embodied female subjectivity may be presented. This takes into account the changeability of both biological and social aspects of maternity, thereby considering the mother’s body *and* the mother-subject’s desire, without presuming the unerring stability of either⁶². The following chapters therefore present a way of thinking subjectivity alongside the body as, after all, “It is not the body described by biologists that actually exists, but the body as lived in by the subject” (de Beauvoir in Zerilli 1992: 122-123).

⁶² In theorising subjectivity via the birthing body, I do not intend to in any way generalise or suggest that all human females can, do, or desire to give birth.

CHAPTER 2: NATURALISING MATERNITY

Sentimental motherhood in the popular media

Given the systematic disavowal of the maternal body in the various discourses discussed in the previous chapter, it comes as no surprise that the patriarchal views expounded have filtered down to popular representations of pregnancy. Pages of theory has been devoted to how popular media function as significant distributors of knowledge, arising from, representing and shaping the cultures within which they circulate⁶³. With the representation of motherhood in popular culture by now also extensively theorised, the purpose of this chapter is to present a very broad and sweeping overview of the gist of these critiques. While an in-depth investigation into maternal representation within each medium is neither possible nor necessary⁶⁴, the naturalised, idealised version of motherhood that is collectively perpetuated by popular media as well as its close alignment to traditional, patriarchal ideologies will be examined through select examples. This brief summary of the dominant tendencies of popular maternal representation is necessary in view of the argument presented in subsequent chapters that the *Confinement* series is, in part, an explicit response to precisely such imaging.

Although it can be construed that the heightened exposure of pregnant bodies, advanced for the most part by an obsession with celebrity culture, has made images of maternity more accessible and possibly more acceptable in the public sphere than ever before, I am in agreement with Josephy that depictions of the maternal body still usually occur “in the most clichéd contexts where they are put to emblematic, symbolic and allegorical functions” (2006: 35). Further, the increased visibility and admissibility of pregnancy in the media has simultaneously subjected women to

⁶³ See Fiske *Understanding Popular Culture* (2010), Grossberg et al. *Mediamaking: mass media in a popular culture* (2006), Lewis *The adoring audience: Fan culture and popular media* (1992), Miller *Technologies of truth: Cultural citizenship and the popular media* (1998), MacDonald *Representing women: Myths of femininity in the popular media* (1995), Featherstone “The body in consumer culture” (1991) Burgess and Gold *Geography, The Media & Popular Culture* (1985), to name but a few.

⁶⁴ The mediums of popular maternal discourse include, among others, pregnancy and parenting magazines (as well as the broader category ‘women’s magazines’), childcare literature and manuals, instructional videos, advertisements, television programmes and various online channels such as websites, blogs, forums, video sharing platforms and social media pages.

additional and expanding forms of “insidious social control” (Deveaux in Fox et al. 2009: 553) that serve to scrutinise, direct or openly condemn their choices. As Andrea Liss proposes, “no other body – literally and conceptually – lies so precariously at the uneasy intersections between what is culturally defined and bifurcated as the public and the private (2013: <http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk/editorial.html>). In this way, even new mediums have not yet “rendered insignificant material expressions of power” nor “opened up new windows on birth” within the cultural imaginary (Longhurst 2009: 46). By reflecting dominant discursive constructs, popular media can instead be seen to reinforce normative standards, thereby influencing expectations and behavioural patterns of pregnant women through the projection of a ‘universal ideal’ (Sha and Kirkman 2009: 359).

In confronting and counteracting the naturalised representations of maternity - those images “endowed with myth, stereotype and sentiment” (Josephy 2006: 35) - *Confinement* projects a view of pregnancy as primarily contextual rather than natural, locating the embodied maternal subject “as the battleground where discourses of subject and ‘rights’ have exacted a heavy toll” (Maher 2007: 24). As Maher suggests, accounts of the pregnant body as a “site of conflict and trouble” may indeed lead to a dramatic reinterpretation of contemporary politics of maternity, defying cultural formulations of the maternal subject as the passive, inert and willing recipient of patriarchal control.

2.1. Media power: Surveillance and self-regulation in performative motherhood

Following Foucault’s understanding of the ways in which modern systems of institutionalised ‘truth’ exert increasing power over subjects, whose submission to such systems through processes of self-regulation becomes the expected ‘norm’, popular media can be seen to exercise a form of invisible social control⁶⁵. In disseminating current forms of ‘knowledge’ and ‘expert’ advice derived from, perhaps most evidently, scientific discourse and medical technology, but equally from the

⁶⁵ It is important to note that Foucault rejected the notion of ‘truth’ as absolute and transcendent. He referred instead to ‘truth claims’, which indicates that the development of knowledge is influenced by politics or power relations. ‘Truth’ is therefore seen as nominal and representative of contingent factors and historical epistemes. Foucault thus understands power as requiring a justifying ‘truth’ which is presented as knowledge, resulting in his formulation of power/knowledge dyad as an inseparable analytic concept (Barker 2008: 92).

combined impact on the cultural imaginary of all the discourses discussed in the previous chapter, popular media undoubtedly propagates dominant cultural ‘norms’ and societal expectations regarding appropriate maternal conduct (Fox et al. 2009: 554). In so doing, as well as operating as a powerful form of public surveillance, it effects “moral obligation and neo-liberal governance over women’s behaviour in accordance with culturally specific ways of ‘doing’ pregnancy” (Fox et al. 2009: 554). As such, Fox et al. describe the discourse of motherhood within popular media as a “disembodied space”, within which “pregnant women are expected to ‘perform’ pregnant embodiment in specific manners according to their spatial, temporal and cultural context, presenting artificially constructed ideals of femininity and beauty” (2009: 560)⁶⁶. The media can therefore be seen to function as “modes of enunciation and address” that both inform and reflect the dominant, patriarchal discourses of western culture. In reiterating the desirable, self-regulated practises of mothers, the media effectively enforces societal judgement and the disciplining of pregnant bodies. In so doing, media representations uphold patriarchy’s silencing of the maternal subject, “insist[ing] on women’s absence as speaking subjects even in the face of their presence” (Zerilli 1992: 112).

Although the maternal subject has become more visible in popular representation, thanks in part to the recent proliferation of pregnant celebrities in fashion and lifestyle magazines and television programming as well as the “virtual explosion” in the genre of pregnancy and childcare self-help texts⁶⁷, the conception of motherhood is still

⁶⁶ In making this claim, Fox et al. draw on Butler’s notion of performativity. Through the overdetermination of physical and emotional aspects of maternity in the media, so the normative behaviours expounded by such representations become virtually “unconsidered and automatic, habitual routine conduct”, in short, ‘performative’ (Bourdieu in McNay 2000: 42). The reiteration of such norms can thus be “understood to found and consolidate the [maternal] subject” (Butler in du Gay et al. 2005: 108). The inscription of the mothering role upon the female body in this manner can arguably be expanded to wider gender determinism, and is thus fundamental to the inculcation of physical and emotional dispositions that maintain gender roles in family relations as well as private and public positions.

⁶⁷ Douglas and Michaels note how, since the 1990s, profiles of celebrity mothers in lifestyle magazines have celebrated so-called ‘Supermoms’, who seemingly ‘have it all’, creating an overly romantic view of motherhood and a resurgence of ‘the tenets of new momism’ and ‘intensive mothering’ (in Nash 2005: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.ark5583.0019.002>). Imogen Tyler explores this tendency in her article “Skin-Tight: Celebrity, pregnancy and subjectivity” (2001) as does Laura Tropp in “Faking a Sonogram: Representations of Motherhood in *Sex and the City*” (2006). Regarding pregnancy self-help manuals, between 1970 and 2000 more than 800 books on motherhood advice were published (Dobris and White-Mills 2004: 26). Douglas and Michaels propose that the media in general has become “the major dispenser of the ideals and norms surrounding

generally limited, and presented in a manner tacitly complicit with paternal authority. As Maher proposes, “Appropriate adult femininity and heterosexuality, and women’s place in a patriarchal society come together in the figure of the pregnant woman and seem to suggest inertia and compliance” (2007: 21). Authors such as Sha and Kirkman suggest that women’s magazines in particular present comparable discourses of pregnancy which are “consistent with an understanding of society as patriarchally constructed because of the ways in which they serve to control women’s role and behaviour to compliment the authority of men”. This is evident in the magazines’ “binary categorisation of pregnant women, scrutiny of the pregnant body, and endorsement of pronatalism, all of which serve to monitor and control women” (2009: 362, 366)⁶⁸. Johnston and Swanson (2003) reach the same conclusion, noting how the importance of such representations in propagating patriarchal ideologies of motherhood should not be underestimated, while Williams and Fahy (2004) propose that patriarchal as well as medical and capitalist interests are promoted by magazine representations of pregnant women⁶⁹. Similar claims are made in relation to pregnancy manuals, which “...reinforce existing gender behaviour patterns and stereotypes ... promote an ethic of consumption, and encourage conformity to authority” (Ellingson in Dobris and White-Mills 2004: 27).

motherhood” and “millions ... [have] preferred media advice” to advice from their own mothers (in Dobris and White-Mills 2004: 26).

⁶⁸ In their analysis of representations of pregnant women in Australian women’s magazines, (2009), Sha and Kirkman identify the relevant discourses on pregnancy as: 1) Pregnant woman’s appearance must be confined within strict conservative boundaries; 2) The pregnant body is excluded from the slender ideal and sexual appeal; 3) Pregnant women require a partner; 4) Pregnancy is a woman’s destiny; 5) pregnancy gives promise to a future; and 6) Pregnant women are responsible for their own health and that of the foetus (2009: 362). The authors note further that although magazines are culturally specific, the conclusions drawn are not confined to Australia, but that similar findings are evident in related studies in the United Kingdom and the United States. Following South Africa’s compliance with the magazine industries of those countries, as well as the tendency to sell international titles locally, similar discourses could arguably be recognised within maternity magazines in this country.

⁶⁹ Fit Pregnancy (Feb 2005) published an article entitled “Look good on no sleep”, which presents practical ways, along with corresponding branded products, for women to diminish the signs of exhaustion caused by motherhood. The article endorses the use of facial moisturizers and concealer make-up, shimmering powder, lip gloss and fragrances, suggesting the application of well-known global cosmetic brands such as Dior, Clinique, L’Oreal, Neutrogena, among others. Besides the clear intention of advancing capitalist interests by promoting personal consumption, such articles encourage women to suppress the realities of maternal experience and obscure those aspects of motherhood that do not conform to the motherhood ‘ideal’. The implication is that maintaining an ‘acceptable’ physical appearance somehow equates to being a more ‘successful’ mother with maternity thus “full incorporated into the language of self-perfectability” (McRobbie 2006: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/mar/02/gender.comment>), while failure to do so insinuates a level of slovenliness and being unkempt that is associated with a wider “failed femininity” (ibid).

In the article “*YouTube: a new space for birth?*” 2009, geographer Robyn Longhurst examines the emergence of representations of childbirth made available in the public sphere through media such as online video sharing platforms⁷⁰. Although she advocates that such technology has the potential to broaden the aesthetics of birth, her finding is that this possibility is not yet being realised. Media platforms such as *YouTube* therefore typically continue privileging particular western (especially American) experiences of birth, and thus “reiterate discourses of ‘good’ mothering and censor...particular (mainly vaginal) representations of birth” (Longhurst 2009: 46)⁷¹. Longhurst thus concludes,

...although it might be tempting to read *YouTube* as breaking down some of the fears and misconceptions about birth because the images of birthing are now readily available to millions of people, power relations in cyber/space reflect and reinforce power relations in ‘real’ space... *Youtube* does not sit outside of normative expectations of what constitutes ‘acceptable’ representation of birth, but rather functions to reflect and reinforce these expectations (2009: 48).

Tyler also notes how new modes of visualisation had an impact on the representation of birth in the early decades of the 21st century, which saw childbirth televised. Regarding this phenomenon, Tyler discusses the *Birth Night Live* 2006 series, in which two hours of live television broadcast from within the maternity ward of Queens Medical Centre in Nottingham were brought to British viewers by reality

⁷⁰ Founded in 2005, *YouTube* is a free online video platform that attracts millions of viewers and users who create and share short videos. Information released in 2007 indicated that in excess of 100 million clips are watched daily, with over 65,000 new videos uploaded on a daily basis. It is thus likely that these figures have increased substantially by 2013. The ‘*Youtube* fact sheet’ (2008) states: “Our user base is broad in age range, 18-55, evenly divided between males and females, and spanning all geographies. Fifty-one percent of our users go to *Youtube* weekly or more often, and fifty-two percent of 18-34 year-olds share videos often with friends and colleagues” (in Longhurst 2009: 47). As Longhurst notes, although *Youtube* is not the only online video sharing platform, it is currently the most significant one.

⁷¹ A direct parallel can therefore be seen to exist between *Youtube*’s censoring of vaginal births compared to the graphic depiction of Caesarean births, as discussed in the analysis of medical discourse’s birth imaging in Chapter One. Longhurst notes that *Youtube* searches “indicate that ‘natural’ births are far more likely than Caesarean births to be censored” and “some of the videos of Caesarean births are very graphic in their depictions of incisions, membranes, blood, tissue and surgical instruments” (2009: 57). Again, it is the medical component of such births that is emphasised in the online videos over the subjective experience of the mother. Conversely, due to the vagina being perceived as an “eroticized orifice” (Grosz 1990: 88), visualisations of vaginal births in popular media blur the boundaries between sexual gratification and maternal function, making them objectionable.

television company Endemol (the makers of *Big Brother*)⁷². The fact that the reality series took place within the hospital setting already places it within a very specific cultural framework. Further, the show was hosted by a celebrity sports presenter and featured interviews with newly postpartum actresses and models, as well as other informative items such as inserts on the latest *intrauterine* medical techniques and unusual birth stories (for example, the birth of identical quadruplets which occurred earlier that year). The question of how ‘democratising’ such representations are, as well as the extent to which they counteract ‘myths’ instead of reiterating cultural stereotypes and further pathologizing childbirth through the depiction of necessary patriarchal control, is indeed questionable.

2.2. Essentialism and sentiment: The “biological paradigm” and the maternal ideal

If it is true, as Beauvoir contends, that in maternity “Women is of all mammalian females at once the one who is most profoundly alienated (her individuality the prey of outside forces), and the one who most violently resists this alienation” (in Zerilli 1992: 119), then it appears this sense of ambivalence and alienation towards maternal embodiment is unrepresented, indeed unrepresentable, in popular media discourse. Rather, the images accompanying such discourses tend to naturalise the maternal function of women by imposing a set of norms that seem to commonly identify with the universalised “biological paradigm” of maternity (Brakman and Scholtz: 2006: 56). This paradigm posits childbearing as necessarily part of a woman’s ‘nature’, thus imposing values of how motherhood should shape relations and self-identity. At the same time, the construct disregards the claim that birthing bodies are not entirely ‘natural’, refusing to acknowledge that they too exist as “an interface between nature and culture, biology and the social, materiality and discourse” (Longhurst 2009: 48).

⁷² Marketed as ‘celebrating the miracle of birth’ the show featured live footage from an elective Caesarean performed by hospital staff. A group of expectant mothers undergoing ‘natural’ labour, whose babies were to be delivered by midwives, were also filmed live. While the producers hoped that “at least one [would] manage to produce a baby within the initial allotted two-hour time slot” and even though provision was made to extend the show for up to another two hours, only the Caesarean birth transpired. The show came under much criticism from midwives, The National Childbirth Trust and parent groups, as well as from some of the hospital staff members (Revell 2006: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2006/oct/01/broadcasting.medicineandhealth>).

The “biological paradigm” of maternity can be seen to be constituted by claims of, among others, a woman’s ‘innate’ desire to bear children, the ‘natural’ connection or bond between mother and unborn child, a plea for the inherent ‘beauty’ of the experience of pregnancy and partiality towards natural labour, and an assertion of the necessary genetic connection and accompanying privileging of the biological family (Brakman and Scholtz: 2006, 57). When such notions become universalised, they form the normative values of maternal experience which are re-embodied in the practises of mothers. In defining, recognising and rewarding such values, that which is different or ‘other’ is either wholly excluded, considered secondary or lacking, or openly condemned by the wider social order. In neglecting individual mothers’ unique attributes, experience, corporeality and personal psycho-social history, such models severely limit the potential for maternal agency within contemporary society and fail to recognise the often contradictory actions these may engender. Instead, moral obligation and societal expectations are enforced upon mothers, exacting judgment over their lived experiences. As Terry Kurgan notes, “the coexistence of such experiences, for instance, as joy and rage, desire and loss, pleasure and frustration, malaise and happiness are screened from us by culture’s stereotyped and popularised images. But also by women themselves who unavoidably, and at great cost, try to live up to the impossible expectations of these cultural fantasies, and hide or obscure their failure” (1998: 1).

As Davis and Walker observe, while the concept of ‘natural childbirth’ has multiple meanings, most popular understandings of the term “are predicated on an essentialist notion of the body” (2010: 458) stemming from the naturalist thesis of the childbirth movement of the 1950s. This thesis maintains that “pregnancy, childbirth and parenting involve instinctual behaviours that women are naturally inclined to assume” (Davis and Walker 2010: 458). Advocates of the naturalist approach view these instinctive processes as having been corrupted by socialisation and call for a return to more ‘primitive’, ‘natural’ responses to childbirth and infant care. For example, vaginal birth is valorised over Caesareans, and breastfeeding is promoted over bottle feeding. These in turn become indicators of maternal, and on a wider level, feminine corporeal competence. Davis and Walker contend, however, that while the goal of such an approach may be to challenge the biomedical construct of the deficient female body, the natural childbirth thesis can be as oppressive to

women if a mother is viewed as inadequate or a failure for being unable to reach its standards. As the authors explain,

[T]he assumption in this approach is that there is a 'right' way... to labour and birth, and that the truly enlightened woman will be able to break free from the shackles of Western enculturation to reconnect with her primitive instincts ... If we suggest that instinctive, natural birthing is an essential quality of all women, then what of women who do not birth in this way? Are they less than real women? (Davis and Walker 2010: 459).

This view clearly upholds the binary opposition between physiological and cultural experience, and refuses to acknowledge the possibility of mediation between the two. In failing to recognise that childbirth, and a women's response to childbirth, are influenced by physiology as well as by culture and socialisation, some women are wholly excluded from the essentialist 'ideal' created.

Regarding the reinforcement of the maternal 'ideal', popular media seems to be in line with presentations of the maternal subject as heterosexual, selfless, fertile, middle class, of an appropriate age of between 25- to 35- years old, and contented (Hadfield et al. 2007: 256; Gillespie 2000). Johnston and Swanson note how, conversely, many mothers who fall outside the dominant ideological definition of the "good mother" are relegated to "the bottom rungs of the hierarchy of motherhood" (2003: 22)⁷³. These include teenage mothers, *primigravida* or older mothers, single mothers and lesbian mothers. Tyler too argues that mothers who do not conform to this ideal construct are routinely discriminated against. She thus notes:

... young working class mothers are still routinely demonised in political discourse and are stable television comic fodder, older mothers are censured and reviled for perverting 'nature', working mothers are routinely castigated for failing their children, mothers who don't work outside the home are rebuked for failing themselves, their families and the economy. Meanwhile, the spectre of infertility has taken root within the imaginary life

⁷³ The jury still seems to be out regarding working mothers, pitting the 'Superwoman' career-driven mother against the stay-at-home 'Earth Mother', with each camp justifying its own ideology by co-opting the values of the other. For further analysis on the ideology of motherhood as a social construction, see Risman (1998); Bassin, Honey & Kaplan (1994); Glenn (1994); and Coontz (1992).

of white middle-class girls and women and the 25% of women who now chose not to have children are pitied and feared. The visual backdrop to these terrorising maternal figurations is an unending parade of images of beautiful, young, white, tight pregnant and post-partum celebrity bodies (Tyler 2008: 2).

The cover of the latest edition of worldwide best-selling pregnancy manual, *What to Expect when You're Expecting* (Murkhoff and Mazel, 1984) (figure 1), the first book in the *What to Expect* series⁷⁴ (now in its fourth edition, published in 2009), is a prime example of this stereotypical 'ideal'. The figure on the cover of the book depicts an attractive, young, white woman, cradling her neatly protruding belly in her hands, while gazing lovingly at it with downcast eyes. Evident from the gold wedding band on her left hand, the woman is married and therefore conforms to the necessity of the heterosexual family unit within the discourse of motherhood communicated. The model is not adorned with any other jewellery or elaborate accessories, intimating that she is most likely middle class and modest⁷⁵. The fact that the woman is styled wearing her pyjamas, which are also appropriately 'feminine' being a light shade of pink with floral patterning and lace trim, affirms the positioning of the

⁷⁴ The *What to Expect* series of pregnancy and child care texts consists of five books, namely *What to Expect When You're Expecting* (Murkhoff & Mazel 1984), *What to Expect: The First Year* (Murkhoff & Mazel 1989), *What to Expect: The Second Year* (Murkhoff & Mazel, 2011), *What to Expect: Babysitter and Nanny Handbook* (Murkhoff & Mazel, 2003), *What to Expect: Eating Well When You're Expecting* (Murkhoff & Mazel, 2005) and even *What to Expect: Before You're Expecting* (Murkhoff & Mazel, 2005). The first book in the series is reportedly the world's bestselling pregnancy manual. In the article "Rhetorical Visions of Motherhood: A Feminist Analysis of the *What to Expect* Series" 2004, Catherine Dobris and Kim White-Mills analyse the series' contributions to the patriarchal vision of motherhood. The authors conclude that the recurring themes through the series emphasize "that the mother's voice is perceived as inauthentic and inadequate in the very process of mothering. Only authorities, historically male, more recently female, but always supporting a patriarchal view of parenthood, are sanctioned to provide proper advice and guidance for women ... Pregnancy itself is couched in stereotypic images of the 'traditional family' setting ... the [texts] also radiate strong residues of cultural and gender stereotypes" (2004: 34). Further, Dobris and White-Mills find that "the authors' treatment of non-traditional families perpetuates a heterosexist worldview, reinforcing a classist hierarchy, by reaffirming the vision of middle class life as the norm and affirms a patriarchal vantage point for assessing both the 'good' and 'bad' mother" (2004: 34-35).

⁷⁵ This stands in direct contrast to Demi Moore's 1991 image on the cover of *Vanity Fair*. It has been argued that Moore's eroticisation and wealth, displayed through the representation of her "dripping in diamonds" which she "wears... like a dress" represent her cultural power as an idealised white woman as well as opening an entirely new space within the public realm (Nash 2005:<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.ark5583.0019.002>). The *What to Expect* model is, by contrast, far less controversial, styled as someone with whom most 'normal' mothers-to-be can personally identify, making her more accessible, private and universalised.

mother's vocation as confined to the private, domestic space of the home⁷⁶. This is in itself representative of the wider tendency of the sexual division of labour, which establishes a naturalised opposition between public and private spheres. Based on gender essentialism, mothers are confined to domesticity via their 'natural' evocation of bearing and raising children, positioning them as homogenously and rigidly distinct from involvement in the larger public, political and social world. The maternal subject's implied inability or lack of desire to engage in the public sphere or to perform extended social functions is further enforced by the popular reference to the pregnant woman as "a victim of 'maternal amnesia', 'placenta brain' or even more colloquially 'porridge brains'" (Josephy 2006: 35).

Besides looking comfortingly homely and fairly inexpensive, the cotton fabric and specific style of night clothes is in no way sexually alluring. Also, although a small portion of skin from the model's modestly rounded stomach is exposed below the pyjama top, it is just enough to be viewed as sensual without crossing any dangerous boundaries into the territory of sexuality. Further, the downcast gaze of the expectant mother, who looks with a sense of pleasure and self-absorption at her pregnant belly, could be read as a reluctance to assert herself as the subject of gestation. This is instead deferred to the child within her, thereby emphasising the mother-to-be's own 'essential feminine' humility, passivity and submission, while calling attention to the subjectivity of the developing child within her, who effaces the expectant mother as the real subject of the book.

⁷⁶ In the article "Locating Mothers: How cultural debates about stay-at-home versus working mothers define women and home" (2008) Heather Dillaway and Elizabeth Paré explore motherhood through the notion of spatial location, illustrating how cultural discourses on motherhood extend to definitions of home, and the individuals and activities that exist within certain spaces. The authors concur that the dominant motherhood ideologies in contemporary media naturalise and valorise "full time" or "intensive" mothering, which defines women's "place" as the private, domestic sphere and her activities as "a lack of paid work" (2008: 442). By this ideology "mothering *must* take place within the confines of a private sphere or home, and caregiving must appear to be women's sole activity ... 'Mother' becomes synonymous with 'home' as well, as 'family' is defined as residing in this particular location" (Dillaway & Paré 2008: 442). Conversely, mothers who exit the home are far more controversial, underpinned by "a cultural assumption ... that working mothers are 'prevented by employment from being full-time mothers'" (Ranson in Dillaway & Paré 2008: 444). As the authors explain further, "The 'supermom' image notwithstanding, discourse specifically advocating or supporting the paid work of mothers is often labeled as antihome, antifamily, antimotherhood, and antichildren ... If mothers work outside the home, this attention (however partial) to another spatial location defines them at once as lesser mothers" (2008: 446).

The absence of a male figure on the cover implies that beyond the physical experience of pregnancy itself, practices of care-giving and child-rearing too – which are included in the book in *Part 4: After the Baby is Born* - are inferred as ‘women’s work’, leaving men to engage in public, social practices beyond the confines of the private, feminine maternal sphere to which the mother is destined. Fatherhood is included somewhat as an afterthought, with one chapter of the book dedicated to this topic under *Part 5: For Dads, Chapter 19: Fathers Are Expectant, Too*. This chapter includes subsections entitled “Dealing with her Symptoms”, “Expectant Sex Explained”, “Surviving her Mood Swings”, and “Keep an Eye on Her Mood”. The implication of such titles clearly pathologizes the woman’s body and emotional state in pregnancy, locating her in a position of “passive helplessness... in need of assistance from a body more in control of itself” (Alexander 1998: 5). Such depictions undoubtedly shape familial and wider social relations, creating universalised, uncontested assumptions that the female body is ‘naturally’ in need of protection by the more ‘capable’, ‘stable’ male.

The stereotypically gendered view of the implicit vulnerability of the pregnant female body is reiterated in the images published in the *Snaps: Sharing your blessings* page of *Your Pregnancy* June/July 2012 magazine (figure 2)⁷⁷. In this regular feature, readers respond to the invitation of “Sharing [their] blessings” by sending in photographs of themselves with their “gorgeous bump... or baby”⁷⁸. This very invitation can be seen as an extension of the public surveillance of the maternal body, indicative of how such governance operates on both a personal and public

⁷⁷ A bi-monthly publication, *Your Pregnancy* is the only dedicated South African pregnancy magazine, forming part of the wider *Your Parenting* stable published by Media24. According to AMPS 2010 BA statistics of readership numbers, the ABC data for January to June 2010 shows a circulation of 32,548 and a total readership of 296,000. Aimed primarily at readers within LSM (Lifestyle Standards Measure) 6-10, the racial demographic split is aligned to that of the South African population within this category, with black readers making up the majority of readers (80%), followed by white (11%), coloured (8.5%), and Indian (0.5%) (*Your parenting* 2011: http://www.yourparenting.co.za/files/2011/2/24/215/ap_ratecard_2011_all_pages.pdf). It is therefore surprising that the majority of images utilised in advertisements and articles are of white women. This can be understood, however, within the context of the historical privileging of heterosexual, young, able, *white* bodies within western representation, to which *Your Pregnancy* seems to be complicit. The magazine representations therefore contribute to the “normalization” of the pregnant body as based on this constructed ‘ideal’.

⁷⁸ The address to which readers are to post their images is titled “You’re here at last”. The inclusion of such text immediately establishes a context for maternity as the inevitable, coveted state of female embodiment. Myra Hird and Kimberley Abshoff explore the discursive field of the conflation of feminine and maternal desire in the article “Women without Children: A Contradiction in Terms?” (2000).

level, as women are encouraged to look at themselves as well as inviting the critical gaze of others. The published images can consequently be seen as 'rewards' for exemplary maternal practise, as the mothers thus attain the editorial team's, other readers', and wider society's approval. Of the four images published in this edition that include a father figure, three of the photographs position the man behind the pregnant women with his hands resting protectively on her belly. As well as implying a sense of ownership of the pregnant body, which is now displaying the visible outcome of his own virility, this positioning locates the mother as a vulnerable, passive receiver. Beyond the obvious privileging of the normative nuclear family, it can again be construed that such conventions, to which the majority of readers apparently abide, reiterate the 'necessary' control of women's pregnant bodies. Such acts arguably contribute to the production of homogenised, conformist modes of maternal embodiment.

The notion of 'maternal bliss' is another important motherhood discourse conveyed in popular media images. Such representations establish a context for maternity as the inevitable, coveted state of female embodiment. Maternity is thereby positioned as women's biological 'destiny' through the assumption that all women want to bear children, or simply, to be defined as a woman at all necessitates the existence of such a desire within the female subject. Feminine desire is conflated with maternal desire since maternity is expected to be the fulfilment of women's aspirations, or indeed a 'natural', necessary consequence of womanhood. The images of popular media therefore commonly reflect the universalised expectations of a mother's selfless interaction with her children and maternity as the ultimate state of feminine contentment (Johnston and Swanson 2003; Maushart 1999; Thurer 1994). This patriarchal conception of motherhood denies women an identity outside of the maternal function, so that the inability to conceive or choice not to have children imply failure as a woman (Sha and Kirkman 2009: 365). Further, by positioning motherhood as the joyful fruition of every woman's aspirations, any maternal unhappiness and dissatisfaction is regarded as the failure of the mother, whose self-sacrifice is valorised as indicative of unerring maternal love⁷⁹. Selfless acts are

⁷⁹ By extension, the verb "to lose" when used in relation to the colloquialism "to lose a baby", referring to miscarriage and which may or may not have anything to do with the mother's actions, implies irresponsibility primarily on the part of the mother. To further illustrate this point, the Post Natal Depression Support Association

presented as self-fulfilling and truly satisfying, failing to take into account any form of “healthy maternal ambivalence” (Raphael-Leff 2010a: 1) that may exist within the lived experience of maternity.

It can be argued that the lived maternal body is becoming increasingly aestheticised and homogenous as expectant or new mothers are encouraged to identify with the universalised “biological paradigm” of maternity (Brakman and Scholtz: 2006: 56). In disseminating such a conception of motherhood, these discourses deny mothers “agency, authority, authenticity and autonomy” (O’Reilly 2010: 20). As Zerilli states, the maternal body is thus one “whose biological meaning is culturally produced by being inscribed in discourses of motherhood – discourses that uphold the mother as subject by denying mothers and women as subjects”; a view shared by Judith Butler for whom “the body is not a natural fact but an historical idea” (1999: 120).

2.3. Commodity pregnancy: Consumerism and celebrity motherhood

Aligned to the notion of biopolitics as a means of controlling the labour force within particular systems of power, a major role of media discourse is to serve the interests of capitalism through specific representations of childbearing women. The content therefore commonly presents highly seductive, concentrated images and text that effectively communicate social constructions of motherhood by “attaching a surplus of positive values to the maternal” (Doane in Zerilli 1992: 112). As well as naturalising motherhood, the constructs situate mothers as integral adherents to the nuclear family, which is arguably itself a capitalist construct. Magazine discourse in particular has further been especially effective in objectifying the maternal body as an instrument of commerce, to be equipped with the latest in maternity fashion and beauty trends, medical treatments and foetal assessments, exercise equipment, health foods and supplements, and an array of other maternity-related products and services advertised within the publications’ pages. With a significant portion of revenue derived from advertising sales, consumer magazines offer a crucial space

of South Africa (PDNSA) posits a relatively high prevalence of Post Natal Depression in South Africa as effecting >1 in 10 women. Despite this occurrence, Post Natal Depression remains stigmatized as a socially taboo subject, resulting in what the PDNSA terms a “conspiracy of silence” around the disorder (2008: Online. Available: www.pndsa.org.za)

for the wider perpetuation of the capitalist system. Readers can therefore literally and figuratively 'buy-in' to the commoditisation, medicalisation and sentimentalisation of motherhood.

Popular media's obsession with celebrity pregnancy is on the rise, epitomised by the vast sums of money paid for exclusive publishing rights to celebrity maternity features or photographs of their newborn babies⁸⁰. Beyond this, popular media is particularly persuasive in constructing specific pregnancy personae for women, including the 'sexy mother', the 'anti-mother' (for those who allegedly carry out poor dietary and lifestyle habits throughout pregnancy), and the 'good mother' (who portrays sound family values of a successful marriage and contented domestic life, as well as an effective postpartum fitness regime), with each 'character type' embodied by celebrity examples. With the multitude of voyeuristic photographs dedicated to documenting their lives, celebrity pregnancy has the potential to become a collective cultural experience (Nash 2005: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.ark5583.0019002>), as in purchasing the magazines or watching the numerous television shows dedicated to celebrity pregnancies, consumers of popular media endorse the views and qualities of motherhood depicted. This has arguably made the disciplining of the maternal body more prevalent than ever before as women are compelled to live up to sometimes unrealistic goals, thereby becoming 'willing' accomplices in their own subjugation (Davis and Walker 2010: 460).

Fox et al. include an interesting subsection in the article "I don't think it was such an issue back then': Changing experiences of pregnancy across two generations of women in south-east England" (2009) on media and body image, in which the authors note how the pregnant body is "becoming seen as something of a fashion

⁸⁰ In November 2005, *People* magazine paid US\$500,000 to feature Britney Spears' first born son on their cover page. The magazine paid the same amount for images of Angelina Jolie's baby bump, while \$4.1-million was paid for pictures of her and Brad Pitt's first daughter in 2006 (Britain's *OK!* paid 3.5-million) and US\$11-15-million for photographs of the couple's twins in 2008. Other celebrities who have received payments in excess of \$1-million for images of their newborns include Nicole Ritchie, Jessica Alba, Christina Aguilera, and Jennifer Lopez, among numerous others (Acuna 2012: <http://www.businessinsider.com/happy-mothers-day-most-expensive-celebrity-baby-photos-2012-5?op=1>). More recently, the extensive, obsessive media coverage of the Duchess of Cambridge, Kate Middleton's pregnancy (which started even before the official announcement thereof with numerous pre-conception tabloid rumours and continued relentlessly until and after the birth of the "royal baby") is further evidence of the growing fixation with celebrity pregnancy within popular culture.

statement" (2009: 560). This places added pressure on pregnant women to live up to ideals of appearance and body size/shape. As such, articles on post-natal weight loss, diet and exercise, for example, are a common feature of popular maternal discourse. The authors thus note, "In a culture that places high value on slimness and low value on mothering, the 'out-of-control', fat, leaky, pregnant or post-natal body is hard to reconcile with the degree of control women are expected to have over their body shape and image" (Ussher in Fox et al. 2009: 562). This emphasis on the fit maternal body has also seen the development of magazine titles specifically targeted to exercise, fitness and diet in pregnancy, such as *Shape Fit Pregnancy*, all of which contribute to the expectations surrounding 'good' mothering. As Meredith Nash notes, "In popular culture, a pregnant woman is successful if she can manage to gain only a limited amount of weight, exercise throughout her pregnancy, eat healthfully, nurture her fetus and then lose the weight immediately following the birth of the child" (2005: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.ark.5583.0019002>)

The ambivalent relationship between sexuality and pregnancy is another well theorised topic in feminist perspectives on popular maternal representation, particularly regarding celebrity pregnancy. While writers are generally in agreement that the growing preoccupation with and (mostly) approving portrayal of celebrity pregnancies encourages pronatalism and maternal normalisation (Brown and Ferree 2005, Sha and Kirkman 2009: 366), it seems views are divided regarding pregnant bodies and sexual appeal. As Betterton attests, representations of 'sexy' mothers or 'yummy mummies' construct the maternal body as impossible (in Nash 2005: *ibid*), while Nash explains, "by priding herself on her looks, sex appeal and slim body shape whilst pregnant, the 'yummy mummy' is culturally a woman who cannot be a 'mother' based on traditional constructions of mothers and particularly the pregnant body as abject and asexual" (2005: *ibid*). Women who defy pregnancy norms by wearing tightly fitting clothing, bikinis or who perform public activities, are in a sense "culturally not 'mothers' but [women] who... create their own personal meaning of pregnancy, rewriting its traditionally defined social meanings" (Nash 2005: *ibid*)⁸¹. In

⁸¹ Longhurst's study of a pregnancy bikini contest in New Zealand, entitled "'Corporeographies' of pregnancy: 'bikini babes'" (2000), presents the argument that the image of the maternal body in a bikini "dissolves the clear-cut notion of public and private", causing "pregnancy trouble" by resisting the societal prescription that pregnant women act demurely, as well as challenging the dictates of the conventional male gaze for feminine beauty, body

the article “Motherhood, Sexuality, and Pregnant Embodiment: Twenty-Five Years of Gestation” 2010, however, Kelly Oliver comments on how the apparent reversal of the traditional separation between maternity and sex “has exploded onto the scene in recent years as media is full of ‘hot mamas’, ‘MILF’s’ (‘mothers I’d like to fuck’), ‘yummy mummies’, ‘knocked-up knock-outs’, ‘baby mamas’... and ‘momshells’⁸²” (2010: 764).

While some women’s magazines purport that sexual allure during pregnancy is suggestive of moral failure and something to be condemned, others celebrate certain celebrity’s ability to subvert the desexualisation of pregnant women⁸³. For example, photographs of pregnant Britney Spears wearing a revealing midriff top that exposed her pregnant belly appeared in *New Weekly’s* (NW) 2005 *Worst Dressed* section, as well as in the article ‘Maternity Makeovers: Glowing or Ghastly?’, which invited reader condemnation of the singer’s behaviour (NW, 2005). Several articles also reported on Spears’ comments on feeling unattractive and insecure in her expanding body (for instance, ‘Britney Tells: I’m Sick of Being Fat!’ [*Women’s Day* 2005] and ‘Britney: I Hate my Baby Body’ [NW 2005]). In *Woman’s Day* 2005, Spears’ eventual compliance to societal expectations of the maternal subject featured in the article ‘Britney’s Mummy Makeover’ in which she finally earned approval through her “conservative hairdo and tasteful maternity dress” (in Sha and Kirkman 2009: 363).

By contrast, *Elle* magazine (October 2005) published the feature article ‘Oh Baby! Britney Spears on Motherhood, Marriage and Her Sex Drive’. As implied by the

shape and comportment (in Nash 2005: [http://hdl.handle.net/2027 /spo.ark5583.0019.002](http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.ark5583.0019.002)). Similarly, a photograph published of pregnant Britney Spears in her bikini generated immense reader response, ranging from sympathy, to support, to outright condemnation. For more information on the male gaze, see Laura Mulvey’s influential article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975).

⁸² The term ‘baby mamas’ refers to the growing influence of teenage mothers. Oliver suggests that Hollywood films such as *Juno* (2007), *Labour Pains* (2009) and *Knocked Up* (2007), as well as magazine features of pregnant teen celebrities such as Jamie Lynn Spears and Bristol Palin have influenced young girls’ desire to be pregnant. She notes, “At least in one segment of our society, pregnancy has become cool, even for unwed teenage girls” (2010: 765). This is further evidence of the highly incoherent and contradictory messages perpetuated regarding maternity. The term ‘momshells’, on the other hand, is a play on notion of sexy women as ‘bombshells’. Oliver comments that this phrase is also suggestive of female sexuality being dangerous, like a bomb. Maternity thus becomes associated with “a deadly weapon. Moreover, momshell also connotes the idea that the maternal body is a shell, a container” (2010: 764).

⁸³ This trend is not restricted to magazine discourse, but is apparent across popular media representations of the maternal.

article title, the text describes Spears embracing impending motherhood as well as her sex life, accompanied by glamorous photographs of the pop icon, either swathed in pink and purple pastel chiffon or clothed in seductively sheer dresses, posing in boudoir settings and fully exposing her belly (figures 3 and 4). While on the one hand alluding to Spears' sexuality, the bedroom setting is equally indicative of Spears' newly 'domesticated', decorous lifestyle, especially in comparison to media coverage of her very public, often rebellious activities preceding her pregnancy. This is heightened by the inclusion of children's fluffy toys as props within the images, which suggest a sense of recovered innocence and childlike meekness, yet with the provocative poses and Spears' pregnant state, also intimate a 'Lolita-like', sexualised dimension⁸⁴. Further, the copy includes comments by Spears expounding the 'naturalness' of her pregnancy, her 'love' of being pregnant, and her newfound marital bliss. Despite the image's provocative styling and the somewhat contradictory inferences of sexuality, the image of maternity expounded can therefore arguably be seen to still align the article to traditional, patriarchal discourses of motherhood.

2.4. Conclusion

As Tyler contends, "the maternal has never been so very public, so hyper-visible, but the wall of commentary which surrounds the maternal and the images which represent it, are deeply incoherent" (2009: 2). Although undoubtedly contradictory and often dissimilar to many women's lived experience of maternity, media representations of the maternal reveal significant insights into patriarchy's intense focus on 'ideal' motherhood in contemporary society. The essentialist connection between motherhood and femininity perpetuated by media discourses support a reductive patriarchal conception of maternity as distinctively non-cultural, with the overtly sentimental, romanticised images serving to entirely separate the maternal body from cultural function. As maternal subjects internalise the normative standards, expectations and behavioural patterns projected as the universal 'ideal' of maternity, so the agency available to mothers to speak as desiring beings, as well as the multiplicity of desires that exist within the maternal experience, are limited and disregarded. Instead, the dominant discourses of media representation continue to

⁸⁴ Taken from the title of the controversial novel *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov (1955), the word has developed an urban slang reference to a sexually attractive or sexually provocative female under the age of sexual consent.

displace the active, material, corporeal and complex experiences of the mother-subject, who is denied “agency, authority, authenticity and autonomy” within the individual experience of maternal embodiment (O’Reilly 2010: 20).

It is for this reason that Kristeva’s repositioning of the maternal body as a profoundly generative space and a fundamental figure in the socialisation of infants and children becomes pertinent to this study, as her theories of subjective development locate a space for the ambiguity and materiality of the maternal body to be reconsidered. Kristeva’s resolute reassertion of the maternal body and opposition to patriarchal reductions of the feminine to “maternity”, as well as her celebration of the maternal as a disruption of the symbolic order of language, are useful starting points for a re-evaluation of maternal subjectivity. Further, her notions of abjection and the abject maternal present interesting explanations for the source of cultural anxiety and patriarchal disavowal directed at the maternal body. The subsequent chapter therefore examines Kristeva’s theories in some detail, and proposes that, by recovering the maternal body as a productive force and by recognising the significance of maternal embodiment as that which “speaks to the contiguity of subjects” (Shildrick 2010: 2), subjectivity may be expanded by maternity, rather than reduced by it.

CHAPTER 3: MATERNAL ABJECTION AND EMBODIED SUBJECTIVITY

A Kristevan approach to Svea Josephy's *Confinement*

I think a lot of [*Confinement*] is the undesirable that is foregrounded in a way that, you know, puts it out there. Here it is: a catalogue of undesirable products (S. Josephy, personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012).

Overwhelmingly theory is bodily, and theory is literal. Theory is not about matters distant from the lived body; quite the opposite. Theory is anything but disembodied (Harraway in Tyler 2009b: 87).

Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic theories present a continued commitment to reconceptualising the body as the central locus for the production of meaning and subjective development. Presenting this body as fragmented, imperfect and, above all, permeable and shaped by both physical flows and social forces, Kristeva uses the materiality of the body as a means to interrogate prevailing cultural discourses of the subject. By challenging a conception of the body as "invulnerable, predictable and consistent in form and function, above all, free from the possibility of disruption" (Shildrick in Betterton 2006: 86), her writing is positioned as a powerful counter-discourse to the sense of bodily stability and subjective autonomy favoured by prior, phallogocentric models of the subject. Although many theorists could arguably be considered relevant to this study regarding their re-evaluation of the mind/body relationship and their challenge to the patriarchal disembodiment and silencing of the maternal subject outlined in previous chapters⁸⁵, it is Kristeva's theorisation of the maternal body's relation to abjection, as well as its imperative to her remodelling of the relationship between the corporeal and the cultural, that makes her work particularly pertinent to an analysis of *Confinement*.

⁸⁵ The work of Luce Irigaray, Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous, Nancy Chodorow, Jane Gallop, Christine Battersby, as well as members of the "Australian school" such as Rosalind Diprose, Moira Gatens, and Elizabeth Grosz, among others, could all be seen as relevant to this topic.

The purpose of this chapter is therefore to explore how Kristeva's theories radically reassert the significance of the maternal body in processes of subjective development, as well as to investigate abjection as a theoretical resource for challenging cultural inscriptions of maternity. Further, Kristeva's position, as presented in *Stabat Mater* 1986, on the ethical significance of pregnancy and its potential to develop a new relation between self and other, will be considered. According to Kristeva, pregnancy is a bodily state that has intrinsic intellectual value – it offers a way of being-in-the-world with a uniquely disruptive potential that challenges the stability of the patriarchal order. Instead of being derided for its inability to respect borders, Kristeva's pregnant body is a place of effective resignification, valorised as a source of "productive violence" against the illusion of a stable, autonomous subject, and presents opportunities for the articulation of alternative identities. This is an important consideration in view of Josephy's desire to produce the works included in *Confinement* as an attempt to, in a sense, 'intellectualise' the physical experience of pregnant embodiment. As she states,

Confinement is in part an interrogation of my own gender and identity at a time in my life when my own experience has shifted my understanding considerably. These are works in progress and part of a larger body which form a personal document of transition. This shift was marked on the surface and internally through pregnancy and childbirth (Josephy 2006: 38).

In *Confinement* Josephy explicitly engages with the Kristevan abject in order to situate her experiences of 'becoming-mother' against the dominant discourses of maternity and birth, and thereby, to interrogate broader issues of gender and identity. At the same time, she recognises the disruptive potential presented by representations of the female body for her more political aims. As she states, "Clearly, given the profoundly political nature of obstetric and postpartum discourse, any discussion within this arena must be linked to the politics of sex and motherhood" (2006: 35). By drawing attention to that which is either included or excluded from frameworks of 'acceptable' maternal representation, Josephy brings abjection to the fore as a means to expose the structural and political acts that establish the foundations of social existence (Tyler 2007: 79). *Confinement* is thus a

project of “intensive critical investment” in which the creation of images of the maternal subject “move[s] towards a more critical political methodology while maintaining a personalised engagement” (Josephy 2006: 39)⁸⁶.

The notion of abjection has undoubtedly been a compelling, if highly contested source for feminist criticism⁸⁷. As Deborah Caslav Corvina elaborates of its critical force, “the abject woman becomes a subversive trope of female liberation: she speaks an alternative, disruptive language, immersing herself in the significance of the flesh, becoming wilfully monstrous as she defies the symbolic order” (in Tyler 2009b: 85). Similarly, Johanna Freuh notes how *Powers of Horror* has greatly influenced feminist theorising of the body:

Here the mother (-to-be) epitomizes abjectness: she enlarges, looks swollen, produces afterbirth, lactates, and shrinks; she is beyond the bounds of even normal female flesh and bleeding; she is breakdown, dissolution, ooze and magnificent grossness. The mother is perfectly grotesque, a psychic monument to the queasy slipperiness that is the luminal reality of human embodiment (in Tyler 2009b: 85).

⁸⁶ Josephy draws on two artistic metaphors articulated by Rachel Cusk in *A Life's Work* 2001, being the “anvil” and a “unique window” to explain her intent regarding *Confinement*. Using these images, Cusk writes: “Childbirth and motherhood are the anvil on which sexual inequality was forged, and the women in our society whose responsibilities, expectations and experience are like those of men are right to approach it with trepidation. Women have changed but their biological condition remains unaltered. As such, motherhood provides a unique window into the history of our sex” (2001: 9). Josephy comments that these symbols “underline the ambiguity of my feelings in approaching *Confinement*: the ‘unique window’ or framing device potentially offers a pleasant or at least rewarding vista, while the ‘anvil’ suggests a more sinister, yet also attractively robust process of conceptualisation” (2006: 35). While this chapter covers Josephy’s rationale behind the creation of *Confinement*, Chapter Four deals with a closer exploration of the aesthetics and hermeneutics of the work.

⁸⁷ The extraordinarily wide impact of the theory of abjection, as presented in the influential *Powers of Horror* 1982, within the wider sphere of cultural production and feminist theory in particular, is well acknowledged. Many feminist writers have used Kristeva’s theory as an “enabling concept” or model of transgression for challenging and/or displacing “the disciplinary norms that form dominant representations of gender” (Tyler 2009b: 79, 82). Theorists such as Creed, Russo, Taylor and Corvino are optimistic about the political potential of abject criticism, and the possibility that “cultural representations of abjection” can destabilize and/or subvert misogynistic representations of women (Corvino in Tyler 2009b: 82-83). However, Creed simultaneously cautions that “The problem with Kristeva’s theory, particularly for feminists, is that she never makes clear her position on the oppression of women. Her theory moves uneasily between explanation of, and justification for, the formation of human societies based on the subordination of women” (1993: 68). Similarly, in the article “Against Abjection” 2009, Tyler criticises the “current feminist preoccupation with the ‘transgressive potentiality’ of ‘encounters with the abject’”, calling for a more social and political account thereof (2009b: 77).

By using abjection as an interpretative approach for an analysis of *Confinement*, I am aware of the risk of figuring the maternal as a site of horror, deconstructing “woman into her messiest and most slippery parts”, thereby replicating “images of the reproductive body grotesquely unravelled which constitute the maternal [as] monstrous” (Halberstam in Tyler 2009b: 86). It is not my intention, however, nor do I believe was it Josephy’s, to simply “reproduc[e] histories of violent disgust towards maternal bodies” (Tyler 2009b: 77). Instead, I attempt to demonstrate how *Confinement* employs the visual and psychological ‘language’ of abjection as a means to confront or disrupt these very histories⁸⁸. Following Kristeva’s theorising of the abject as that which disturbs order, authority and meaning, use of the abject in art can be seen as an “assault on the totalizing and homogenizing notions of identity, system and order” (Ward 1994: 47). Abjection can therefore be used to explain the structural and political acts of inclusion/exclusion which establish the foundations of social existence (Tyler 2009b: 79). The base materialism of abject art confronts and transgresses social prohibitions and taboos, revealing the limits of the socially ‘unmentionable’ through a re-enactment of psychic traumas and personal obsessions or phobias, which challenge the stability of both individual identity and the social body⁸⁹. As Menninghaus argues, this form of abject criticism can be seen to be based on “an affirmative logic in which what is ‘officially considered abject’ is provocatively embraced as a ‘positive alterity’ in order to challenge the legitimacy of discrimination” (in Tyler 2009b: 84). In this way, the representation of the abject may

⁸⁸ In this way, *Confinement* can be seen to be situated under the broader term ‘abject art’. According to Winfried Menninghaus, following the English translation of *Powers of Horror* in 1982, ‘abjection’ became a “new buzzword [in] political and... critical discourse”. He states, “an adequate account of the academic career of the abjection paradigm could easily fill a whole book in itself” (in Tyler 2009b: 78-79). In 1993, the Whitney Museum in New York staged an exhibition entitled “Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art”, which gave the term wider currency in the art market. In the exhibition catalogue, the curators defined abject art in material terms as “work which incorporates or suggests abject materials such as dirt, hair, excrement, dead animals, menstrual blood, and rotting food in order to confront taboo issues of gender and sexuality”. Frazer Ward refers to a number of prominent abject artists, including Cindy Sherman, Mike Kelley, Robert Mapplethorpe, Andres Serrano, Kiki Smith and Sue Williams, all of whom took part in the 1993 exhibition (1994: 48).

⁸⁹ Together with George Bataille’s notion of the *Informe*, *Powers of Horror* is, predictably, fundamental to the “extensive critical-theoretical apparatus” (Ward 1994: 48) which developed around this artistic tendency. In the essay “*Informe* without Conclusion” 1996, Rosalind Krauss analyses the influence of both Kristeva and Bataille on abject art. The term *Informe*, introduced in Bataille’s “The Deviations of Nature” 1930 refers to processes of “inversion”, the negation of homogeneity or “deviance” from a ‘natural’ ideal (Krauss 1996: 105). Further, the *Informe* is produced as waste by the very processes that create the ideal. Although this clearly aligns to Kristeva’s view of the abject as that which is “a condition of the unified, thetic subject, yet is intolerable to it” (Grosz 1989: 73), a detailed analysis of the *Informe* is beyond the scope of this thesis.

serve to challenge existing norms of maternal images in visual culture, drawing attention to the instability of margins, boundaries between inside and outside, selves and others⁹⁰. As Josephy attests,

While the media has exploited the theme, art has approached it with trepidation ... The documentary approach to capturing the subject has by far been the most common and immediate way of engaging with the topic but the challenge remains one of using productive alternative visual languages to depict this theme⁹¹ (2006: 38).

I am also conscious of the feminist challenge to Kristeva that abjection is founded on the dissolution of the maternal subject⁹². While Kristeva undoubtedly celebrates maternity as the site of radical splitting of the female body with the potential disruption this may pose to the symbolic order, she simultaneously interprets pregnancy as “a near dissolution of the woman’s identity as she comes close to merging with another” (Ziarek in Mullin 2002: 30)⁹³. For this reason, Iris Marion Young’s phenomenological approach to the lived experience of pregnant

⁹⁰ Josephy draws attention to the fact that contemporary arts practice has largely “steered a fairly wide berth of depictions of pregnancy, motherhood and the young child” (2006: 35). As an example, Josephy cites *The Body* (1994), a photographic survey of the human form that includes over 400 photographs of the human body, only two of which are of pregnant women. Similarly, very few photographs of young children are included in the publication.

⁹¹ Although it is true that many other taboo themes of the body have been comprehensively confronted in visual arts while childbirth has remained rarely explored terrain (Tyler and Clements 2009: 134), there are, naturally, some exceptions to this statement. For example, North American artist Jessica Clements has since 2005 realistically depicted the physical act of childbirth in large-scale oil paintings, while London-based Hermione Wiltshire has used radical midwifery images from the 1970s in her work. See also the photographic work of Rineke Dijkstra, Imogen Cunningham and Susan Hiller, as well as Alice Neel’s paintings and Mary Kelley’s installation pieces. Within a South African context, Christine Dixie, Penny Siopis and Terry Kurgan have also, in various ways, approached this theme.

⁹² See Tyler (2009b), Butler (1999), Rose (1993) and Zerilli (1992).

⁹³ As Mullin states, “For Kristeva, the only way a woman can reconnect the split aspects of herself – and this is only temporal – is in her relationship with her child once it is born” (2002: 31). It is for this reason that Kristeva has been criticised by Judith Butler, among others, for perpetuating the compulsory “obligation on women’s bodies to produce” (Butler 1999: 115). Further, Butler challenges Kristeva’s focus on the maternal body as conservative insofar as it presumes a “maternal instinct.” She says, “Kristeva understands the desire to give birth as a species-desire, part of a collective and archaic female libidinal drive” that makes pregnancy and motherhood the telos of all women’s lives (Butler 1999: 114). Kristeva’s insistence on matricide as our vital necessity has also received criticism from feminist writers such as Tyler. This point will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

embodiment from the position of the mother-subject will be considered⁹⁴. In her canonical article “Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation” (1984), Young presents the argument that discourses on pregnancy largely omit subjectivity, citing Kristeva’s view that none is “concerned with the subject, the mother as site of her proceedings” (1984: 45). Following Irigaray and Kristeva, Young proposed an active and resexualized conception of maternity that restores desire and subjectivity to the maternal body (Oliver 2010: 763). Suggesting that the rapid changes experienced during pregnancy bring about moments of sharp awareness of the body, Young asserts the importance of correcting the assumption that “I cannot be attending to the physicality of my body and using it as a means to the accomplishment of my aims” (Young 1984: 50)⁹⁵. She thus contends, “Pregnant consciousness is animated by double intentionality: my subjectivity splits between awareness of myself as body and awareness of my aims and projects” (Young 1984: 51). Through a phenomenological reflection on pregnant experience, Young therefore seeks to “let women speak in their own voices” (1984: 45). Likewise, it is through her visual engagement with the evidently traumatic, highly invasive, corporeal experience of giving birth, along with the various institutional discourses to which she was subjected, that Josephy’s representations of her maternal body constitute a visual ‘voice’ from which to position herself as a *speaking* maternal being. As Mullin attests, “If we are to seek alternative ways to explore women’s experiences of pregnant

⁹⁴ Young’s approach draws on prediscursive phenomenological philosophy of Strauss and Merleau-Ponty, who proposed that subjectivity is located not in consciousness or in the mind, but in the body. However, Young herself contends that following the critical reaction of postmodern writers such as Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, Kristeva, Deleuze, Irigaray and Bourdieu to existential phenomenological traditions, “we cannot be so innocent as to believe that phenomenology can discover ‘pure’ embodied experience prior to ideology and science”. As such, “one can no longer say that phenomenology is a rigorous method, but more that it is an approach to enquiry” (Young 2005: 8). Critical enquiry therefore needs to take into account notions of social plurality and systems of power and repression which invalidate the humanist concept of a subject as unitary and original to experience (Young 2005: 7). For this reason, the approach is being used in complement with Kristeva’s psychoanalytic notions of subjective development, which draw on more postmodern notions of intertextuality and poststructuralism. For further defence of utilising existential phenomenology as a resource for feminist critical theory, see Toril Moi’s “What is a Woman?” 2001 and Young’s “Lived Body vs Gender: Reflections on Social Structure and Subjectivity” 2002.

⁹⁵ This statement can be seen to criticise Merleau-Ponty’s belief that an awareness of one’s body makes one feel estranged and objectified. As Young notes, ‘classic’ phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty assume that in adopting an active relation to the world, the subject is not aware of his/her body for its own sake: “For several of these thinkers, awareness of my body as weighted material, as physical, occurs only or primarily when his instrumental relation to the world breaks down, in fatigue or illness” (1984: 50). Young argues that pregnancy on the contrary reveals a paradigm of bodily experience “in which the transparent unity of the self dissolves and the body attends positively to itself at the same time as it enacts its projects” (1984: 46).

embodiment in all their significance, we cannot refuse to explore the ways those bodies appear to the women themselves and to others” (2002: 32). Josephy therefore states,

Confinement looks for ways in which representations of pregnancy, birth and childhood can be disinvested of the mythologized, sentimentalised depictions and move towards more critical political methodology while maintaining a personalised engagement. These works are made with the intention of reclaiming the maternal subject and as a document of a profoundly life-altering experience. These works aim to recover the fragility and beauty, which exists in the rawness and the violence of giving birth (2006: 39).

Confinement therefore provides what I view as a personal, social and political account of *being abject*, creating a powerful sense of self-displacement or disassociation between the personal experience of a lived, embodied maternity and essentialist, patriarchal notions of motherhood. A crucial effect of the images is to emphasise the maternal body as that “strange fold” (Kristeva 1986: 259) between “the natural and the cultural, between the semiotic and the symbolic, between identity and its erasure” (Bolous Walker 1998: 145). Through representations of the body that undoubtedly trouble the prevailing image of the maternal ideal, the disembodied maternal subject of previous chapters is radically, at times violently, disrupted. In this way, *Confinement* offers the viewer “a different scene of maternity where the familiar figure of the mother becomes the uncanny figure of the maternal”, in ways that create “an alternative space in which to interrogate maternity in its psychic and social complexity” (Zerilli 1992: 113, 115).

3.1. Returning maternity: Revaluing the cultural contribution of the maternal body

Through her psychoanalytic theories, Kristeva has continually worked to raise awareness of the maternal subject. A central concern of her academic project has been an intense focus on the maternal body as that which fundamentally challenges patriarchal models of the subject based on singularity, unity and stability. While

utilising the figure of the maternal to expose the inadequacy of the masculine idealisation of the autonomous, stable subject, Kristeva has simultaneously aimed to disrupt the patriarchal notion of “maternity” by developing a theory that does not universalise femininity under maternal function. Rather, by insisting that the maternal body operates between nature and culture, and on the mother as an always-already speaking being, Kristeva counters the stereotypical essentialist reduction of the maternal, presenting a ‘new politics of the body’ as a basis for theorising maternal subjectivity. As Tyler asserts, “maternal subjectivity in this account is not a natural or biological relation, but is the primary psychological and social relation, a visceral relation that operates as the template for the very boundaries of the self/other and all that follows” (2009: 5).

It is in Kristeva’s theoretical investigation of pre-Oedipal processes of subjective development that an intimate connection to the maternal body is made. These processes include the mobilisation of drive energies⁹⁶, the thetic moments⁹⁷, abjection and the semiotic as a pre-linguistic condition of symbolic functioning⁹⁸. As Grosz comments, “The centrality of the maternal to all of Kristeva’s investigations provides a framework for examining the contributions of women, femininity and

⁹⁶ Kristeva’s theorising of drive energies as the material motivation for signification is paramount to her reassertion of the maternal body in processes of socialisation. Her theory is indebted to Freud, who saw the regulation of primary drives, specifically the “Death drive” and sexual drives or “Incest taboo” as played out within the Oedipal complex, as the way in which the subject is produced through familial and social relations. In Freud’s theory, unconscious drives (located in the *id*) are what motivate behaviour yet are repressed or sublimated by the subconscious (the *ego*) for successful socialisation to occur (Mansfield 2000: 31). Similarly, drives are the precondition for Kristeva’s “subject in process”. She views the drives as instinctual energies operating at the level of bodily processes (such as identification/differentiation and incorporation/ abjection) and as precursors to the logic of language. Functioning across biological and social spheres, drives are fundamentally formed in relation to the maternal body prior to the subject’s submission to paternal law.

⁹⁷ Kristeva refers to the compounding moments of awareness of ‘self as subject’ differentiated from ‘other as object’ and the comprehension of the referential potential of language to each as “thetic moments”. As Grosz notes, as an anticipation of the symbolic realm, the thetic “posits a unity and an organisation in the subject based on the logic of imaginary identification and symbolic organisation respectively” (1989: 47). The “thetic break” represents the subject’s separation from its mother and its entry into language at the intervention of the paternal symbolic order (McAfee 2004: 21).

⁹⁸ The basis of much of Kristeva’s work is centred on a distinction between two heterogeneous modes of signification, namely the semiotic and symbolic. As the extra-linguistic and linguistic aspects of language respectively, this theory enables Kristeva to bring together the bodily need to communicate with the structure necessary to make communication meaningful. While the symbolic refers to clear, orderly meaning and intelligible forms, the semiotic operates as an evocation of feeling, a sensual underside of intuition, gestures, and intonation brought about through the discharge of drives and energies. As it is the maternal body that provides orientation for the drives, Kristeva again asserts the importance of the maternal in processes of signification.

female specificity to symbolic functioning” (1989: 71). Instead of reducing women to the function of motherhood, Kristeva returns the maternal body to women in order to liberate them from this very reduction. As Fanny Söderbäck notes, Kristeva urges us to return to the maternal body, not as a place of stasis, but as one of productivity qua temporalisation, that is, temporal, moving, displacing, renewing. She states, “the return is neither nostalgic nor aimed at preserving some essential notion of motherhood; it makes possible new beginnings, allowing for a future pregnant with change and transformation” (Söderbäck 2010: 3).

3.1.1. Before the Mirror: Re-defining the *chora*

Kristeva’s early theoretical concern for the maternal is evident in her 1974 doctoral dissertation, *Revolution in Poetic Language*. It is in this work that she first articulates her notion of the *semiotic chora*⁹⁹, which became what Grosz calls a “master term” in Kristeva’s understanding of the stabilisation and destabilisation of the speaking subject¹⁰⁰ (1995: 112). Kristeva’s explanation of the term changes the terrain of its original use in Plato’s *Timaeus*¹⁰¹, radically disrupting the “phallogocentric effacement of women and femininity, the cultural refusal of women’s specificity or corporeal and conceptual autonomy and social value” (Grosz 1995: 112).

⁹⁹ Borrowed from Plato, the term *chora* also features prominently in the work of Kristeva’s fellow post-structuralist, Jacques Derrida (b. 1930). Derrida is adamant that *chora* must be understood without any definite article, however as Kristeva is less specific on this account, I shall continue to refer to it as she does, namely *the chora*. Derrida’s interest in the *chora* lies in his recognition of it as a “deconstructively privileged term”, as that which is impossible to assimilate into textual logic yet is nonetheless essential to its functioning. For Derrida, *chora* refers to a point of indeterminacy at which the text exceeds its own logic and turns in on itself, in other words, where new, self-reflexive meaning is made possible (Grosz 1995: 112-113). This relates to Kristeva’s notion of intertextuality which subverts unified meaning through a disruption of logical, established “truths” (Vargova 2007: 242).

¹⁰⁰ The speaking subject points to Kristeva’s concern for the importance of language in subjective development. Unlike Lacan who views the subject as formed primarily through the structures of language, however, Kristeva incorporates the historical and psychoanalytic dimensions of the “subject in process” with linguistic and semiotic theory. Following her notion of intertextuality, which emphasises the dynamic, productive plurality of meanings in texts, so the speaking subject is one with no core, fixed or unified self. The “subject in process” is a differentiated, complex, heterogenous force, of “innovation, of creation, of renewal... an open system” (Kristeva in McAfee 2004: 41).

¹⁰¹ In *Timaeus* Plato presents his explanation of the genesis of the universe. His account establishes the series of binary oppositions that, as Grosz affirms, mark the character of western thought. These include the distinctions between “being and becoming, the intelligible and the sensible, the ideal and the material, the divine and the mortal, which may all be regarded as distinctions between the (perfect) world of reason and the (imperfect) material world” (1995: 113).

Plato's description of the *chora* eludes any clear definition. As an intermediate category whose function is to explain the passage from the perfect world of conceptual Form to the imperfect world of material reality, he writes, "we shall not be wrong if we describe it as invisible and formless, all-embracing, possessed in a most puzzling way of intelligibility yet very hard to grasp" (Plato in Grosz 1995: 114). Having no properties of its own it is thus impossible to characterise:

... it dazzles the logic of non-contradiction, it insinuates itself between the oppositional terms, in the impossible no-man's land of the excluded middle... Seeped in paradox, its quality is to be quality-less ... It functions primarily as the receptacle, storage point, the locus of nurturance in the transition necessary for the emergence of matter, a kind of womb of material existence, the nurse of becoming, an incubator to ensure the transition or rather copying of Forms to produce matter that resembles them (Grosz 1995: 114).

From its earliest Platonic description, the *chora* has thus been connected to the feminine in its association to various gender-encoded terms, including "mother", "wet nurse", "receptacle", and "imprint bearer". The female connotations serve to position it from the outset as distinct from the paternal force of creation. Plato's use thereof thus produces what Grosz refers to as "a founding concept of femininity whose connections with women and female corporeality have been severed, producing a disembodied femininity as the grounds for the production of a (conceptual and social) universe" (1995: 113).

In Plato's view, the *chora* is thus that which does not produce, but is entirely neutral and leaves no trace of its contributions, while the father/creator provides all specific characteristics to the nameless, indistinct genesis of forms. It is fairly clear to see how such descriptions of the *chora* together with its feminine associations could endorse an essentialist view which ascribes women a role as mothers that is entirely beyond culture or signification. As such, a problematic divide is erected between the pre-symbolic, drive-ridden, 'natural', 'passive', maternal 'receptacle' and the 'logical', 'cultural', 'active', paternal symbolic (Söderbäck 2010: 3). Kristeva's reading of the *chora* however, reappropriates the maternal dimension of the term in a way that is by

no means essentialist as she positions it as that which is always integral to the symbolic order or symbolisation and therefore cannot be pre-cultural. In defining this space as “a nonexpressive totality formed by drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated” (Kristeva in Oliver 1991: 58), Oliver explains how Kristeva’s *chora* operates according to maternal regulation that precedes paternal law, becoming “the prototype for both the place of enunciation (the subject) and the place of denotation (the object)” (1991: 58).

For Kristeva, the *chora* continues to be necessarily maternal since she equates it specifically with the mother’s body¹⁰². Instead of separating bodies from the social and cultural, it is precisely from the corporeality of the maternal body that language emerges. Kristeva asserts that all discourses “move with and against the *chora* in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it... it is a preverbal functional state that governs connections between the body (in the process of constituting itself as a body proper), objects, and the protagonists for family structure” (Kristeva 1984: 26). The maternal body is therefore described as “the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*”. It is a generative space that allows subjective becoming through the active movement of receiving and producing energies which fuel the signification process (McAfee 2004: 20). While the infant’s physical and psychic development is still immersed in the mother’s body as that which is part of itself before delineations of identity or borders of self/other are distinct, it is within this “rhythmic space, which has no thesis and no position,” that the emerging subject establishes “the process by which significance is constituted” (Kristeva in McAfee 2004: 20)¹⁰³.

¹⁰² In a footnote in “The subject in Process” 1974, Kristeva describes the *chora* as follows: “[T]he *chora* is a womb or a nurse in which the elements are without identity and without reason. The *chora* is a *place* of a *chaos* which is and which *becomes*, preliminary to the constitution of the first measurable body ... the *chora* plays with the body of the mother – of woman -, but in the signifying process” (in Oliver 1991: 58).

¹⁰³ With the maternal figure regulating the child’s drives by controlling what goes into and comes out of the child’s body, Kristeva suggests that some of the first sounds an infant makes mimic the bodily relationship of this mother-child dyadic. She describes these as “various processes and relations, anterior to sign and syntax ... [which are] previous and necessary to the acquisition of language, but not identical to language” (Kristeva in Caslav Corvino 2004: 20). Moreover, she proposes that some of these sounds are in fact “holdover muscle reactions from the infant’s previous intrauterine experience” (Oliver 1991: 58). Hélène Cixous’s texts also refer to the pre-Oedipal terrain of the mother’s body as a privileged site of the mother-child, specifically mother-daughter, bond. As Bolous Walker contends, “For Cixous, the daughter learns her preverbal language here, her mother tongue. The mother’s discourse is a language of voice and body, a maternal song. Cixous celebrates voice as a pre-symbolic fusion of body and breath, a continuum that refuses the division and separation of the father’s

As the locus of the extra-linguistic category of communication - the semiotic - the *chora* is a transitional space through which bodily drives are discharged in representation¹⁰⁴. The logic of signification that establishes the symbolic laws of formal grammar, structure, intelligible forms and meaning are therefore already operational at the level of the material body before the subject is able to identify him/herself as such, and therefore before psychological separation from the mother's body has occurred¹⁰⁵. These energy discharges or drives exist in "permanent struggle" (Kristeva in Lechte and Zournazi 2003: 118), causing the excesses and explosive potential of language to exceed both the subject and his/her communicative structures (McAfee 2004: 15). For Kristeva, the drives operate across biological and social spheres as the forces moving between the body and representation that bring one realm into the other. This fundamentally challenges notions of the body as merely material by demonstrating that the logic of signification

speech" (1998: 138). Like Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* and "Stabat Mater", Cixous' own writing can be seen as "a rhythm, a movement that defies the stability of definition and meaning" (Bolous Walker 1998: 138).

¹⁰⁴ Kristeva develops the term "signifiante", to refer to the energy discharges of the semiotic, described as a "primordial signifying practice", or "unbound generating processes" (Kristeva in Du Gay et al 2005: 70). It is important to note that Kristeva does not see drives as being sacrificed to signification. Instead, she argues that although constitutive of the semiotic, "signifiante" is always present in the symbolic albeit rarely noticed due to the dominance of the communicative function of language.

¹⁰⁵ Although Kristeva's notion of unstable subjectivity and her view of language as "the signifying system through which the speaking subject makes and unmakes himself" (in McAfee 2004: 14) are fundamentally indebted to Lacan's formulation of subjective development via entry into the symbolic order, Kristeva challenges Lacan's explicit foregrounding of paternal authority within that order. For Lacan, entry into the symbolic order and thus into the logic, regulation, and socialisation of language and identity, is constitutive of subjectivity, while the governing principle of this domain is the Name-of-the-Father. As the linguistic version of the paternal phallus, it is in coming to terms with the Name-of-the-Father, or transcendental signifier (the 'lost object' and ultimate signifier of power that is continually sought after), that Lacan views subjectivity as being attained. Within this model, the Name-of-the-Father is thus the law that enables entry into language through identification with the symbolic position of power and control occupied by the imaginary father. (Mansfield 2000: 183). Accordingly, Lacan's symbolic is entirely associated with paternal supremacy and law. Kristeva is in agreement with Lacan regarding a theory of the phallic signifier as crucial to the subject's assumption of a position as a speaking being. She does however, manage to subvert Lacan's specifically patriarchal framework of socialisation through her notion of the maternal semiotic as providing the earliest processes of signification, and by insisting on the always speaking being as already negotiating identity in a field of signification that precedes or exceeds Lacan's symbolic order of signs. Further, while Lacan sees subjectification and the entry into language as founded on a lack or loss of unity with the 'mother' and associated with an incessant yet unobtainable desire for the phallus, for Kristeva the subject's entry into language, although perhaps a violent, forceful process involving negation, is not one entirely founded on loss. This is based partly on her view that semiotic drives are not seen to be wholly sacrificed to signification.

is already present therein prior to the subject's self-identification in what Lacan terms "the mirror stage"¹⁰⁶.

What is also revolutionary about Kristeva's theory is that the logic of language is not solely located within the symbolic realm or Name-of-the-Father, but is present in the maternal body prior to the subject's submission to paternal law. In this way, Kristeva undermines Lacan's specifically patriarchal mode of social organisation by reinserting the maternal as a fundamental figure in socialisation¹⁰⁷. Further, it is the very *materiality* of this element, as that which operates in the semiotic body and is heterogenous to the symbolic, that allows for the transition from the presymbolic to the symbolic to occur. As Oliver explains, "Lacan's account of the mirror stage emphasizes the image of the body as other, the body as symbol reflected in the 'mirror'. It throws us into a hall of mirrors where we can no longer identify the 'real' of the body; the real body is impossible. Yet, as [Kristeva] suggests, Lacan's account covers over the fact that without the body there would be no reflection in the mirror" (1991: 56). While Lacan posits the castration threat as the child's motive for movement from one realm to the other¹⁰⁸, Kristeva persuasively argues that in order

¹⁰⁶ Generally beginning at the age of around six months, at which time the child becomes infatuated with its own image, Lacan describes the complex processes that occur during this stage as resultant of a "new physical action" related to narcissism. The *ego* is the psychical agency that provides the conditions for the child to become a subject and object through a process of (mis)recognition – "the recognition of its own image in the mirror" (Grosz 1989: 21).

¹⁰⁷ Tyler contends that Kristeva's psychoanalytic work can be read as a challenge to the increasing predominance of Lacan's phallogentric, "startlingly 'mother free'" subjective theories of the post-World War II period. Kristeva therefore deliberately aims to problematize many of Lacan's foundational concepts, such as the 'Mirror Stage' by "forcing attention onto the role of the maternal in the development of subjectivity" (Tyler 2009b: 80).

¹⁰⁸ Castration anxiety, according to Freud and Lacan, is the ordering principle of sexual development and the impetus for separation from the mother's body. For Freud, the boy child connects ownership of his penis with the presence of his father and, as the marker of sexual difference, with masculine power. Biological differences between the sexes are seen in relation to a fear of castration, with ownership of the penis the only guarantee of power, order and stable identity. This situates the female body as a site of lack (castrated) – a powerful reminder of paternal authority and an ever-present threat which becomes repressed into the subject's subconscious. Whereas this model is applicable to boys only, girls experience a slightly different version within which, seeing herself as already castrated, the girl child seeks a substitute for the lost penis in the form of a baby which she imagines she receives from the father (Mansfield 2000: 32-33). Objecting to the 'anatomy is destiny' universalising features of the Oedipus complex, feminists such as Irigaray and Grosz have identified these models with the construction of discriminatory gender values and politics in western society (2000: 34). In Lacan's theory, the Name-of-the-Father is the law of the symbolic governed by the phallus, the "transcendental signifier". It facilitates the subject's entry into language and thus socialisation through an identification with and desire for the symbolic position of power and control occupied by the imaginary father through language. The

to experience this threat in the first place, the child must take a position as a subject; “it must recognise that it is and yet is not its image” (Oliver 1991: 56). In recognising this ‘gap’ between self and other, the mirror stage thus requires a negation of the other in order to identify self as subject. Negation is however already a judgement, which is made only from a position. This in turn requires that the move is already *thetic* and symbolic. Kristeva thus contends, “To say ‘no’ is already to formulate syntactically oriented propositions that are more or less grammatical” (in Oliver 1991: 56). It is within the corporeal processes operating within the mother-child dyadic that the logic of the symbolic, and of the child’s subjectivity, is therefore by now established. For Kristeva, rather than prefiguring the symbolic, the mirror stage appears already to be symbolic (Oliver 1991: 56).

Kristeva takes an equally opposing view to Lacan’s notion that progression into the symbolic is founded entirely on a sense of lack. For her, it is excess and pleasure which, along with separation and rejection, motivate speaking. Again, all of these originate within the material processes of the maternal body¹⁰⁹. Her notion thus challenges the Lacanian “stern Father of the Law, who performs the function of the paternal third party who forces the child to move away from the maternal body and into the symbolic realm” (Oliver 1991: 57). Instead, Kristeva locates the maternal body as a link between drives and symbols, “the bridge between the biological foundation of signifying function and its determination by the family and society” (Kristeva in Oliver 1991: 57). For Kristeva, the signifying process is thus always biological and social, semiotic and symbolic – it cannot be reduced to either.

With the materiality of language always pointing back to the maternal body, the semiotic is necessarily always present within the symbolic. “As the (re)evocation of the abandoned maternal body, semiotic interventions into the ordering of the

imaginary father, as the mother’s other and that which she loves, is whom the subject wishes to be - he is the pivot around which the beginnings of self and other are constituted through a renunciation of the mother and entry into the paternal symbolic realm (de Nooy in Lechte and Zournazi 2003: 123-124). Although Lacan’s notion of the symbolic phallus does extend Freud’s Oedipal theory away from its literal, biological/anatomical base of desire for the father’s penis, it is still an entirely phallogocentric view.

¹⁰⁹ Kristeva uses anality as a prime example of how separation and rejection are symbolic as well as corporeal, operating in living matter prior to the symbolic. As Oliver explains, “In Kristeva’s account...material negativity is founded on excess ... When there is too much waste, some must be expelled. In anality, rejection precedes the symbolic. Moreover...separation and rejection are pleasurable” (1991: 56-57).

symbolic mark the reappearance of a repressed femininity into the operations of a phallic and paternal sexual, social and representational economy” (Grosz 1989: 98). The semiotic thus provides the energy for social and signifying upheavals which transgress the limits of the symbolic, reorganising them into other, different forms of totality and unity. Kristeva proposes that there is therefore a “maternal law” that prefigures the paternal law claimed by Freudian psychoanalysts as necessary for signification, and thus subjective development. The symbolic realm requires that “supplementary biological and psychological conditions be met” - in other words, the function of the semiotic as directed by the maternal body (Kristeva in McAfee 204: 40). Nick Mansfield elaborates, “[Kristeva] seeks to see in the very processes of the physical body itself the whole drama of subjectivity and its meaning... Our very sense of selfhood at its simplest and most primitive level is connected with the separation and integrity of the body” (2000: 82). In this way, as Grosz explains, “The mother’s body, her desire, and her status, meaning and power within culture are of central importance to any discussion of the socio-symbolic, signifying order” (1998: 78).

For Kristeva, subjectivity “never necessarily stabilises”, it remains incomplete and unresolved (Mansfield 2000: 81). As an unresolved, indeed irresolvable system, it is through continual identifications and differentiations that the “subject in process” emerges, “a project sometimes successfully enacted by a moving and often contradictory subjectivity” (Young 1984: 48)¹¹⁰. Within its incessantly contradictory state, the decentred subject is continually propelled towards new, threatening configurations. As Bolous Walker exclaims, Kristeva’s “‘I’ is not an all-knowing, all-powerful ‘I’. It is not the illusionary ‘I’ of productive logic, the stable site of all meaning and sense. It is not the solitary ‘I’” (1998: 107).

In order for the child to develop a sense of subjective autonomy, Kristeva explains how identification with the mother’s body must be broken or prohibited. Throughout psychoanalytic theory, it seems this prohibition is based on repudiation of the maternal body. As Oliver explains, “the prohibition that founds and yet undermines

¹¹⁰ In some ways, Kristeva celebrates pregnancy as exemplar of the subject in process: “Pregnancy seems to be experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject: redoubling up on the body, separation and coexistence of the self and an other, of nature and consciousness, of physiology and speech” (in Young 1984: 48).

society is the prohibition against the maternal body, whether it is the Oedipal prohibition against incest imagined by Freud, the prohibition against the mother's desire or *jouissance* imagined by Lacan, or the prohibition against the semiotic *chora* imagined by Kristeva" (1991: 59). For Kristeva, the semiotic drives originating from within the *chora* are necessarily repressed due to the threat they pose to the appearance of unity within the symbolic. Oliver continues, "The unity of reason or consciousness cannot admit that it is part of a process that alternates between unity and fragmentation and repetition of drives. To admit this, of course, is to admit that it is not unified" (1991: 60). It is for this reason, in a kind of "perverse protection" (Oliver 1991: 61) that the maternal body is 'abjected' in order for separation to occur. This body, "having been the mother, will turn into the abject. Repelling, rejection; repelling itself, rejecting itself. Ab-jecting" (Kristeva 1980: 13).

3.2. Primary abjection: Maternity and birth as the abject embodied

In *Powers of Horror* 1980 Kristeva explores the conditions by which a self is able to claim its body as its own¹¹¹ and, through this "clean and proper" body, gain access to the symbolic realm and thus socialisation¹¹². This process requires an expulsion of the unclean, the improper, the disorderly; a process Kristeva directly associates with maternity through her graphic metaphor "I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs and vomit"¹¹³ (1982: 3). The abject is that which is radically excluded from oneself but which is paradoxically a part thereof, making us doubt the integrity and autonomy of the selfhood with which we identify. As Mansfield explains, "the correct

¹¹¹ The word power as used within Kristeva's title carries the dual meaning of potency and a sense of potential or capacity to act. It is therefore to be understood in terms of force as well as emphasising the ability to act, of being able or to be able (Smith in Lechte and Zournazi 2003: 130). As already mentioned, *Powers of Horror* draws strongly on Mary Douglas' book *Purity and Danger* 1966, which presents the notion of defilement and the danger to identity constituted by filth.

¹¹² In trying continuously to create an illusion of a coherent, unified selfhood, the "subject in process" defines itself as what Kristeva terms "le corps propre", or the "clean and proper" body. In French, the word "propre" can mean either "clean" or it denotes ownership. "Le corps propre" therefore carries the dual meaning of being a body that the subject owns and maintains in hygienic order (Mansfield 2000: 82). It is this body that the subject refers to through the word "I". In defining its borders the "I" differentiates itself from that which is unclean within its own physical processes, which continuously threaten to contaminate it.

¹¹³ The basis of this insight is indebted to Freud who, in *Totem and Taboo* 1913, claimed that civilisation is founded on the expulsion of "impure" incestual attachments which are repressed within the unconscious (Grosz 1989: 71). Kristeva therefore modifies this view as the abject is not simply unconsciously repressed but never entirely disappears from consciousness (McAfee 2004: 46).

perimeters of our clean and proper bodies are forever broken, punctuated by the physical flows that cross them: flows of urine, tears, shit, vomit, blood, sweat and semen. [These flows] threaten to contaminate our sense of individual identity and security, by making the dividing line questionable" (2000: 83). As borders of the body are challenged by their own secretions, the process of necessary exclusion, whereby the subject violently rejects that which is seemingly part of it, is what Kristeva refers to as abjection.

As a prior state necessary before the intervention of the symbolic begins, articulated by Kristeva as "the separation before the beginning" (in Oliver 1991: 60), abjection requires a foremost expulsion of the mother over any other 'thing'. "The abject confronts us" claims Kristeva, "with our earliest attempts to release the hold of the maternal entity even before ex-isting outside her, thanks to the autonomy of language" (1982: 13)¹¹⁴. In order to begin constituting subjectivity, the child needs to renounce his/her own origins and that from which he/she is still indeterminate, as other. As Oliver explains, "At this point the mother is not-yet-object and the child is not-yet-subject. The mother cannot tell whether this other in her *is* her or not, and either alternative seems equally impossible. The child in this abject relation to its mother is not yet separated from her but is no longer identical to her" (1998: 60). In this way, the maternal body becomes a site of horror for the developing subject:

Man's [sic] dread of the female body is fear of his own corporeal limits, of immanence, of becoming woman – dread, that is to say, of the (m)other. Man's is a fear of an otherness that is all the more frightening precisely because it lies not without but within the borders of his [sic] own identity (Zerilli 1992: 126).

The boundaries of the self are thus constituted and blurred by the mother, since "the 'subject' discovers itself as the impossible separation/identity of the maternal body. It hates that body but only because it can't be free of it. That body, the body without border, the body out of which this abject subject came, is impossible" (Oliver in McAfee 2004: 48). The locus of the maternal body is thus "both unrepresentable...

¹¹⁴ Referring to the subject's acquisition of language, Lechte comments how "The symbolic is not, of its own accord, strong enough to ensure separation; it depends on the mother becoming abjected" (1990: 159).

and the necessary condition for all representation, the unspeakable debt that culture, language and society owe but cannot express without violence" (Grosz 1989: 98).

As that which disturbs identity and authority through a disregard for boundaries, the abject is described as "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (1982: 3), descriptions equally attributable to maternal embodiment. For example, Young emphasises the indeterminacy of the singular body during pregnancy, noting how it "challenges the integration of my body experience by rendering fluid the boundary between what is within, myself, and what is outside, separate. I experience my insides as the space of another, yet my own body" (1984: 49). She continues, "The integrity of my body is undermined in pregnancy not only by the externality of the inside, but by the fact that the boundaries of my body are themselves in flux" (Young 1984: 49). The interpenetration of separate states and indeterminacy of dividing lines embodied by the maternal subject dramatise the "ambiguity, uncertainty and inter-pollution that is the core meaning of abjection" (Mansfield 2000: 84). As Mansfield explains, "Abjection is not just about the bodily feeling of uncleanness, or even unstable subjectivity-in-process. It is the destabilisation of all systems of order, meaning, truth, and law that is at stake" (2000: 84, 85).

It is therefore impossible to separate abjection and horror from the body, and more precisely, from the body of the archaic mother. Described as an "undifferentiable maternal lining" (Krauss 1996: 92), the abject is that which is incorporated but which must be evacuated from the body; an integral condition of the subject, no matter its abhorrence, making us doubt the integrity and autonomy of the selfhood with which we identify. The experience of the abject, beginning with the child's separation from its mother, is a constant threat to the unity of the self, which never fully succeeds in differentiating itself from the other. It is a process both necessary yet impossible, persistent yet never fully accomplished. As Christine Ross observes, the abject indicates "the incapacity of Western modern cultures to accept not only the mother but also... the materiality of the body, its limits and cycles, mortality, disease, corporal fluids, excrement, and menstrual blood" (1997: 149). It is the "infinite unspeakableness of bodily disgust: of blood, of excreta, of mucous membranes" (Krauss 1996: 92), the "corporeal rubbish" which constantly disregards the boundaries of the 'clean and proper' body.

As much as the fear and rage evoked by the violence and impossibility of abjection is directed at the outside of the maternal body, that which “nourishes and weans”, in having carried the child, so too is it “directed against the inside of the maternal body, and especially the inside that becomes the outside, the child among other things” (Oliver 1991: 61). This is particularly pertinent to the images of maternal bodily products photographed in *Confinement*. The ‘undesireables’ that break the border, no longer part of the infant nor the maternal body, are the ‘waste’ that has been violently expelled from the mother’s body. Their presence is most significantly felt and brought into view during the process of birth, the crossing of a threshold at which point one being becomes separated from another. As Oliver attests, “It is at the birth of the child, and not before, that the identity of the human subject is most visibly called into question. Before the umbilical cord is cut, who can decide whether there are one or two subjects?” (1998: 61).

For the maternal subject, it is during the time of pregnancy and birth in particular, that the integrity of the body is most radically undermined and the mother-subject assumes an intensely liminal position. Pregnancy destabilises the concept of a unitary being, the unbounded maternal body fundamentally contradicting “the process of individualised embodiment [in which] we are seen to exercise ownership over our bodies” (Draper 2003: 747). Drawing on Lawton’s (1998) discussion of ‘bounded’ and ‘unbounded’ bodies, if the constrained, sealed, isolated body is central to constructions of identity and self-hood, then unbounded bodies fall wholly beyond this category of personhood (in Draper 2003: 748). As Draper elucidates, “It follows therefore that to restore or maintain ‘personhood’ our body boundaries should remain unambiguous and tightly closed...confirm[ing] Battersby’s point that ‘our body boundaries do not *contain* the self, they *are* the embodied self” (2003: 749 emphasis in original). The maternal subject can in a sense thereby be seen to exist as the embodiment of the abject; that “‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me” (Kristeva 1982: 109).

As a process happening inside the body over which the subject has little wilful control, pregnancy constitutes a very different relationship to corporeality and bodily

ownership, as two beings, the woman and the baby, simultaneously lay claim to the one body. Young is highly conscious of this incongruity, stating:

As my pregnancy begins, I experience it as a change in my body: I become different from what I have been. My nipples become reddened and tender; my belly swells into a pear. I feel this elastic around my waist, itching, this round hard middle replacing the doughy belly with which I still identify. Then I feel a little tickle, a little gurgle in the belly. It is my feeling, my insides, and it feels somewhat like a gas bubble, but it is not; it is different, in another place, belonging to another, another that is nevertheless my body (1984: 48).

Further, the mother's sense of individuality and material possession is called into question by the external ambiguity of the pregnant body, which can no longer operate as a physical marker of individuality (Bailey in Draper 2003: 747)¹¹⁵. Pregnancy therefore provides an opportunity for simultaneous singularity and multiplicity¹¹⁶, "the blurring between the 'inside' and 'outside' [of] the self" (Lupton and Barclay in Draper 2003: 747). With the abject as that which does not "respect borders, positions, rules" but rather disrupts "identity, system, order" (Kristeva 1982: 4) so pregnancy, birth and lactation are processes of non-differentiation that collapse or refuse the physical and psychic boundaries between mother and child¹¹⁷.

¹¹⁵ As already discussed in previous chapters, the external visibility of the pregnant bodies exposes the maternal subject to various forms of social control, as her body becomes 'public property', objectified under scientific, medical, legal and societal scrutiny, further disinvesting her of individual ownership.

¹¹⁶ In *The Sex Which is Not One* 1985, Irigaray argues that female sexuality has always been conceptualised on the basis of masculine parameters, by which women are defined by lack (of a penis, or penis envy). Rejecting the phallogocentric models of sexuality of Freud and Lacan based on the "primacy of the phallus", she instead contends that female sexuality is based on multiplicity. Referring to biological female sexual organs of breasts, clitoris, and so on, Irigaray reconfigures female sexuality in terms of plurality, inverting the balance of power whereby males have a sex that is one, and females, a sex that is multiple, dispersed and self-embracing (Romani. n.d. <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~jenglish/Courses/romani2.html>).

¹¹⁷ Cixous similarly sees pregnancy as a contradictory terrain, "where pleasure and reality embrace" (in Bolous Walker 1998: 139). Cixous directly links the desire to write with the desire to give birth, arguing that language and writing both find expression in pregnancy, which is experienced as a series of rhythms and exchanges (Bolous Walker 1998: 139). Cixous contends, it is "the irreplaceable experience of those moments of stress, of the body's crisis, of that work that goes on peacefully for a long time only to burst out in that surpassing movement, that time of childbirth" (in Bolous Walker 1998: 139). This notion can thus also be seen to contest the patriarchal theorising of pregnancy as a time of creative or intellectual hiatus, of passive 'expectation' and waiting.

In addition to boundary *blurring*, the female body's capacity for boundary *breaking* is brought to the fore during maternity (Draper 2003: 479). According to Young's account, the birthing process entails the most extreme suspension of the bodily distinction between inner and outer (1984: 49). Recalling this moment, she writes: "Through pain and blood and water this inside thing emerges between my legs, for a short while both inside and outside of me. Later I look with wonder at my mushy middle, and at my child, amazed that this yowling, flailing thing, so completely different from me, was there inside, part of me" (1984: 49). In the process of individuation of the infant subject, so the maternal subject's individuality is temporarily suspended as her physical (and psychological) boundaries are violently broken. As Kristeva notes, "Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be" (1982: 10).

As much as birth establishes the process of subjective development through which identity "erupts from the flesh" of the mother's body (Battersby 1998: 39), for the mother-subject too it is a process of extreme conflict, "an explosive site, [which turns] identity (culture and the symbolic) in on itself" (Boulos Walker 1998: 145). For Josephy, the process of becoming a mother was one of severe subjective disruption, for which traditional and popular representations of maternity had left her unprepared. As she contends, "According to these kinds of notions and societal notions it's a case of 'now I am a mother, now I am complete' as opposed to 'now I have been ruptured, I have been torn'. And I suppose even on another level there is a feeling of being torn forever" (Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012). In this way, birth, as primary abjection, is "the ultimate secret violence at the heart of all human existence" (Tyler 2009b: 80), as much for the abjecting subject as for the abjected becoming-mother.

3.2.1. “Violent dark revolts of being”: Confrontation with the abject

And also as you open it up, of course ... then it opens up like this little package of beautiful thing and then [the placenta's] almost like mince or something inside, which is quite, you know, it's bleeding everywhere, it's got a lot of liquid and content which really, literally spills onto this white surface and destroys it (S. Josephy, personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012).

Recalling those items referred to as ‘medical waste’ in chapter one, the bodily products expelled by the birthing and postpartum body are clearly able to be associated with the abject. As much due to their physical state of bloodied, visceral matter, it is their status as ‘halfway’ or indeterminate objects – that which was internal made external, a part of both the mother and of the infant, at once essential to sustaining life yet now superfluous to it, that places them within the category of the abject. Having been forcefully and painfully expelled from her body's borders, it is these products that Josephy carefully collects, preserves and photographs for *Confinement*. Works in the series therefore include photographs of the blood, tissue, organs and fluids extracted or dispelled from her body at various stages in the birthing process, for example, *Placenta* (figure 5), *Lochia* (figure 9) and *Umbilicus* (figure 7)¹¹⁸. Also included in the series are images that record the effects of birth on the body, namely *Epidural* (figure 11), *Caesarean* (figure 10) and *Lactation* (figure 12). Although these photographs make reference to human presence, they are “cropped so close as to amputate them from their physical context” (Josephy 1996: 39). Although Josephy undoubtedly emphasises the corporeality of the maternal body in *Confinement*, paradoxically, the body largely recedes from the work. In a sense, the unity of body is therefore replaced by “close ups of small objects [which] reveal the minute detail of intimate things” (Josephy 1996:38), able to be read as “a scattering of parts” or “traces of violence or memory” (Heartney 2007: 177), a

¹¹⁸ Works from the series will be referred to more generally within this chapter, with detailed analyses of particular images forming part of Chapter Four.

constant reminder of the impossibility of an autonomous, unified self, and as such, the very embodiment of the abject¹¹⁹.

The abject, visceral nature of the bodily products appearing in the photographs presents a direct contradiction to the sanitised, highly medicalised 'procedure' Josephy experienced in delivering her baby via Caesarean section. The 'undesirable', rejected by-products thereby offer her a direct way of engaging with the profound corporeality of birth, an experience which was, in some way, initially taken from her, leaving her without any sense of control or bodily involvement in the process.

As Josephy explains,

I think also [Caesareans are] so neat. With natural child birth, a certain amount of the abject would be obvious to you - whatever is pouring out of your body, first of all what they call 'the waters', and then after all the pushing and whatever that sense or feeling of, like, 'whoosh' - like something coming out and then you would see the baby, presumably you would see the baby straight away. It would be covered in all kinds of stuff, blood. Then you would deliver the placenta, but you would be part of all of that. Whereas [when] you're lying having a Caesar, you've got this screen in front of you; you aren't part of that. The best you can do is, if you're lucky, they'll let you touch the [baby's] foot as it goes past you and then they'll bring [the baby] back once they've already rubbed some of the vernix off it. So that abjection is not totally apparent to you, so maybe, I'm just trying to think of some of the rationale for trying to do this, I needed to

¹¹⁹ Josephy's radical fragmentation of the body has strong resonance with Lacan's primary psychological condition of the *corps morcelé*, "the body in bits and pieces". Lacan uses the term *corps morcelé* to designate the "violently nontotalizing body image" (Gallop 1987: 79) and sense of bodily discord that forms part of ego-formation. The state is referred to retroactively after the "mirror phase" to designate the prior experience of "la turbulence de mouvements" (Lacan in Minahen 2005: 222), the disjointed, anguish-evoking "sensation-fragments" (Minahen 2005: 222) before the child identifies with its totalised, reflected image (what Lacan describes as the 'Ideal-I'). As Minahen explains, the disruption caused by the (mis)recognition of the child's reflected body as complete and apart from an outside 'other' initiates the "process of differentiation" that constitutes passage from the Lacanian Imaginary into the symbolic (2005: 221). Josephy's images thus reflect the sense of fragmentation, disintegration and self-alienation inherent in Lacan's theorisation of subjectivity, "threaten[ing] to expose the fact that the self is an illusion done with mirrors" (Gallop 1987: 83).

see that abjection, I needed to be part of that abjection, I needed to, like, sink my arms into the abjection, because of the sanitised nature of this medical intervention (Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012).

It is thus with an intention to regain control and reclaim her post-partum body that Josephy began creating the images of *Confinement*. By “sinking her arms” into the abject, Josephy is able to reveal some of the trauma and sense of alienation that was inflicted, both physically and psychologically, onto her as maternal subject (and object) during the birth process. The images thereby expose the “raw, commonplace and everyday stuff of the experience” which, although not unusual, are largely hidden from representation. As Josephy attests, “it is a hell of a shock, because we haven’t been prepared for it through our visual culture. Through all these various discourses ... we haven’t been prepared for it in any way. It’s completely absent” (Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012). By exposing the ‘unmentionable’ in such a vivid manner, Josephy’s photographs provoke an intense sense of discomfort, extending beyond physical sensation. The subversive element of the images engenders serious consideration of the “transgressive potentialities” of “encounters with the abject” (Tyler 2011: 77), as the mother-subject is revealed to be an unstable locus of contested meanings rather than a complete, independent, prediscursive given.

3.2.2. “A vortex of summons”: The attraction and repulsion of the abject

Described by Kristeva as operating “unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion that places the one haunted by it literally beside himself” (Kristeva 1982: 3), the abject is a constant reminder of the impossibility of an autonomous, unified self. While in stark contrast to the state of plenitude and satisfaction offered by the mother within the semiotic *chora*, abjection nevertheless retains an element of appeal and desirability which is itself threatening. The fear of falling back into the mother’s body, of losing one’s identity in that intimately familiar place, remains with the subject throughout life¹²⁰.

¹²⁰ For Freud, the fear of losing one’s identity is the ultimate source of the uncanny (*das Unheimlich* or the ‘unhome-like’). Kristeva views abjection and uncanniness as characterised by the same vortex motion of

The contradictory element of the abject, as that which simultaneously appeals yet repulses, is something Josephy deliberately evokes within *Confinement*. As she explains,

Drawing you in and repulsing you is something I was trying to really do in the sense [of using] the formal devices of the studio lighting and making it kind of, on the one hand, not glamorising it, but certainly using that language of studio photography where you must want to look at it but then once you look at it you are kind of repulsed by it. I don't think that showing it in an unmediated form would've drawn the viewer in. So I think I was quite conscious of trying to draw them in first and then, like, overturn that assumption. "What is that? Oh, that's pretty ... Oh, gross" (Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012).

The choice of formal elements of the photographs - the brilliant clarity and meticulous focus of the studio lighting, the purity and crispness of the infinite white space beyond the objects, and the heightened textures, sheen, tactility and intensely saturated colours of the bodily products – combine to produce visually seductive images that invite viewers' involvement. There is something alluring about the indefinable viscosity of the surfaces, which entice the viewer, only later to offend, evoking sensations of intrigue tinged with a revulsion that is impossible to ignore. The desire to recognise something within the images speaks to a perverse sense of attraction and fascination, which is overturned once the viewer is made aware of the actual subject matter, the majority of which are identifiable only by their titles. In utilising the "inappropriate" language of studio photography, Josephy purposefully inverts expectation, noting "there is ambivalence in viewing these photographs in which the abjectness of the bodily product is in conflict with the seductive method employed in photographing them" (2006: 38-39). As thrilling as it is abhorrent, the physical sensation induced by the images directly aligns to the "sickening yet irresistible" (Kristeva 1982: 3) attribute of the abject. Similarly, Tina Chanter asserts that the abject "retains a certain slipperiness with regards to disgust, repulsion, revolt on the one hand, and fascination, attraction, desire on the other hand" (2001: 111).

repulsion and summons. Abjection is however more violent and discomforting than the uncanny as the once most ultimately familiar place (womb) is made radically separate and loathsome (McAfee 2004: 48-49).

Just as the ambivalence of the abject both “beseeches and pulverizes” the subject (Kristeva 1982: 3), so Josephy’s images are both deeply captivating and powerfully repellent.

Although some of the individual photographs are indeed violently abject, it can be argued that as a series the images work together to reveal a sense of intimacy. With only select examples analysed in detail within this thesis, it is important to keep in mind that *Confinement* is a collective body of work, made over a period of time. Each individual picture is therefore in conversation with the others, informed by the combined narrative that attaches to the group. In many ways, the contrasts that result, ranging from the delicate privacy of *Umbilicus* and *Lactation*, to the personal trauma and invasiveness of the blood-stained dressings in *Caesarean*, or the “sleek, molten surface of wounded tissue” (Josephy 2006: 39) in the *Placenta* pictures, communicate the ambivalence of the maternal experience. United by a sense of intense observation and rigorous scrutiny, the works are a curious mix of deep intimacy and strange alienation. The images go beyond a critique of contemporary obstetrics and its silencing of the mother’s voice to a realm of intimate self-scrutiny, in an attempt to reappropriate the body, or literally, parts of the body, of which the subject has been dispossessed. In this way, there is a sense of reconciliation, but also of sacrifice.

In creating this body of work, Josephy herself seems poised on a threshold, echoing Young’s view that “pregnant existence entails ... a unique temporality of process and growth in which the woman can experience herself as split between past and future” (1984: 46). In confronting the experience of becoming-mother through an intense awareness of the sensations and limitations of the newly maternal body, Josephy emphasises the ‘strangeness’ of this process. Far from being ‘natural’ or ‘essential’, for Josephy, it is through the mediation of the photograph that the experience becomes most ‘real’, once her new subjective positioning, and the damage endured in attaining such a position, is able to be reflected upon. As she explains,

I think that all of this was a way of me dealing with it, you know, this is like therapy. The way I process information really in my life, is through dealing with it visually. And I’ve never really been faced with that kind of trauma

before. So the only way I know how to deal with it is through picking up the camera and trying to deal with it in that way, and then by looking at the images, being able to understand something about them. But while making those photographs or in making those photographs I didn't feel very distanced from it. I felt very, you know, it felt very raw. But the end product was making peace with it, in a sense, which I wasn't able to do until I'd gone through that process (Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012).

In this way, *Confinement* not only radically disrupts traditional representations of maternity by drawing attention to limits of 'acceptability', but, through its subversive resignification and "differently imagined bodily scheme" (Betterton 2006: 80), helps establish a reconfigured sense of identity for the artist. As Betterton attests, such images and the "complex responses to them", suggest the need to develop "new topologies of the pregnant and birthing body"¹²¹ (2002: 256) which re-evaluate the status of the maternal subject within cultural discourse and representation. Following Grosz's view that "[i]f it is a social object, the body can be redefined, its forms and functions can be contested and its place in culture re-evaluated and transformed", this is in many ways a central premise to *Confinement*; to interrogate the social positioning of the body as well as the maternal subject:

I know what the purpose was, which was to make sense of it, to help myself to understand it. And not just 'it' (the placenta), but the whole 'thing', the whole process of becoming a mother and that shift that I had to make, that process of being an artist and a mother. How do you make art out of something that's been so prohibited in a sense, in terms of its representation, and also how do you make an object that someone might want to look at? (Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012).

In Josephy's case, it is through an engagement with the 'prohibited' substances of the birthing body that this becomes possible. Indeed, for her, these substances serve as a tangible starting point from which to "interrogate the relations between

¹²¹ In the article "Promising Monsters: Pregnant Bodies, Artistic Subjectivity and Maternal Imagination" 2006, Betterton explores examples of visual arts practise that disrupt maternal ideals, looking specifically at work by Susan Hiller, Marc Quinn, Alison Lapper, Tracey Emin and Cindy Sherman.

prevailing discourses around the maternal subject and the unstable subject of pregnancy, between what can be presented and what remains undisciplined and pathologized within discourses of motherhood” (Betterton 2002: 256).

3.2.3. Mother’s blood, mother’s milk

Women’s genitals and breasts are the loci of (potential) flows, red and white, blood and milk, flows that are difficult to appropriate while under constant threats of personal and legal appropriation, flows that signal both a self-contained autoerotic pleasure and a site of potential social danger insofar as they are resistant to various cultural overlays (being unamenable to coercion and pressure, though in a sense absolutely open to cultural inscription), and insofar as they insist on the irreducible specificity of women’s bodies, the bodies of all women, independent of class, race and history (Grosz 1994: 207).

A body that threatens to break its boundaries “is not a body that can be easily trusted to occupy the respectable public realm” (Longhurst 2001: 45). It is therefore perhaps not surprising that control of the maternal body has extended through various social systems of power and authority, through which the “ideology of sacred maternity” is used to mask man’s “terror of the maternal body” (Zerille 1992: 126). The stability of the dominant symbolic and political orders of patriarchy rest on the disciplining of this ‘unruly’ body, as much by the mother-subject herself, reiterated through the “individual subjects’ commitment to the desperate self-discipline of the clean and proper body” (Mansfield 2000: 85). The “logical” systems of these orders therefore try to deny or disguise the intense internal ambiguity and uncertainty that abjection unleashes. “In fact,” Mansfield notes, “the first and fundamental purpose of systems of order is to repress ambiguity and contradiction, to assert the singularity of truth, the certainty of law, the inevitability of order against the abominations of contradiction, mixture, incompleteness and difference” (2000: 85) – it is precisely these ‘abominations’ that are located in the maternal subject as “the site of the collapse of all oppositions and the confusion of identities” (Doane 1987: 82).

It is for this reason that cultures developed rituals and prohibitions around what is considered sacred or taboo, pure or impure¹²². Referring to these cultural categories and religious traditions as “Biblical abominations”, Kristeva notes it is those substances most closely associated to the maternal body, namely blood and milk, which are most regulated and involve acts of purification or prohibition (in Grosz 1989: 98). “Biblical abominations” therefore have the cultural and historical force of presenting the maternal, and by implication the feminine, as unclean, exemplifying the notion of the maternal as abject (Lechte 1990: 164). Justified either on religious or hygienic grounds, a great effort is made within various cultures to hide, disguise, contain or remove the ‘dirt’ associated with the reproductive capacity of the ‘leaking’ maternal body (Draper 2003). It is these fluids too, along with their threatening capacity to betray the body’s borders, that Josephy vividly exposes within *Confinement*.

As “a food that does not separate but binds mother to child”, Kristeva and others have argued that milk is closely regulated or prohibited by some religions predominantly due to its association with incest (Lechte 1990: 164). Further, it is the ambiguous nature of breast milk that gives rise to abjection – as well as entering the child’s mouth and nourishing its body, this same milk seeps uncontrollably out of pores, beyond the margins of the mother’s body, “point[ing] to the infinitude of the body proper” (Kristeva 1982: 109). As much as this leaking, uncontrollable quality alludes to pollution and the possible contamination of others, a threat to the stability of society, it also gives rise to feelings of shame and humiliation on the part of the maternal subject. With her ‘clean and proper’ self betrayed by her own bodily

¹²² Related to this, Kristeva refers to three broad forms of abjection, namely in relation to food, to waste and to sexual difference, with the latter two categories being most closely related to maternity. Food loathing is figured as the most elementary and archaic form of abjection. Referring to the layer of ‘skin’ that forms on the surface of warm milk as an example, Kristeva notes how repugnance or vomiting is experienced in order to separate and protect the self from both the object and those who proffer it. She writes, “‘I’ want none of that element, sign of their desire. ‘I’ do not want to listen, ‘I’ do not assimilate it, ‘I’ expel it. But since food is not an ‘other’ for ‘me’, who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself with the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish ‘myself’” (1982: 2). The most extreme example of abjection, “the most sickening of wastes” is the universal horror of the corpse. Embodying “death infecting life” the corpse defiles the borders between life and death by showing the subject’s inevitable future. As Grosz explains, “it is intolerable because, in representing the very border between life and death, it shifts this limit or boundary into the heart of life itself” (1989: 75). Regarding sexual difference, Kristeva locates abjection primarily the personal horror and social prohibition surrounding incest and menstrual blood, both of which are fundamentally associated with maternity (Grosz 1989: 76).

processes, she is opened up to societal judgement and condemnation. In patriarchal society, this 'normal' female bodily function is treated as deviant; it invokes abjection and is not accommodated for. As Josephy recalls,

I took that image in hospital. We, the ones who had their babies in incubators, had to milk ourselves ... This milk just starts pouring out of you. Milk pours out of you in the shower... I felt, not quite ashamed, but there was something ... All those kinds of things are very contained. Like having blood on the back of your dress, it's embarrassing¹²³; the inside has leaked to the outside. With the milk it does that a lot. That's why we have things like breast pads, because it's embarrassing on some level to have wet rings of milk appearing on your chest, it's not okay in a professional environment such as this (Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012).

Further, Josephy's image of milk leaking from her breast, *Lactation*¹²⁴, purposefully undermines the exclusive representation of women's breasts as aesthetic objects of masculine sexual desire that dominate contemporary society, popular culture in particular. With this in mind, Josephy articulates her interest in the breast as a fundamental signifier of the maternal which becomes visually unpleasant to look at, emphasising the (male) discomfort associated with breastfeeding. The photograph presents the naked, dripping breast as an affront to the eroticised male gaze, historically directed at the passive female nude:

And breasts are also objects of sexual fascination and standards of feminine beauty, and yet there's this other role that they have, which is sustenance, nurture ... And it's that role that is suppressed, generally, [for] the role of the beautiful breast, the object of desire. Now [Lactation] is something that takes it out of being an object of desire into being

¹²³ It is interesting to note that in Latin-based languages, the word "embarrassment" carries in its common usage the meaning "pregnancy" (Liss 2013: <http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk/editorial.html>). For example, the Spanish word *embarazada* means "pregnant" (although as a past participle, it translates directly into English as "impregnated"), while the same word can sometimes mean "hampered" or "hindered", and *embarazoso* is used to denote a sensation of unease. It is believed that the English word, *embarrassed* was derived from the French term *embarrasser*, "to block" or "to obstruct", which in turn is derived from the Spanish *embarazar*. The Spanish term *embarazar* is derived from the Arab word *baraza*, which means "to block, obstruct, oppose". "embarrass", (n.a. 1989: <http://dictionary.oed.com>. [10 June 2013]).

¹²⁴ A detailed reading of *Lactation* is included in Chapter Four.

something else, which is, I think, not a way that we, in our culture, often represent breasts. And it's not something that we like to think about because, again, in a kind of patriarchal society, what are breasts for? They're for men to look at and to play with, to, you know, fantasize about. And, I think - without being like a 70s 'breasts' thing¹²⁵, I'm not trying to foreground the nurture necessarily – [the breast in *Lactation's*] certainly not 'pretty' or desirable in that way (Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012).

Josephy's explanation of the anxiety engendered by *Lactation* can be seen to relate to male repression of the source of their attraction to the breast, being the recollection of the warmth and nurturance of the maternal body within the semiotic *chora* before the rupture of entry into the symbolic order of paternal law takes place. This once intimate association with the breast is thus made alien in order to avoid the "overproximity [that] produces panic in the subject" (Foster 1996: 114), which is in itself a process of abjection.

The indeterminacy of substances and fluidity of signifiers able to be attached to breasts once again implicates them in women's identification with the alienated, abject body. In an attempt to displace the "objectification and sometimes self-objectification undergone by women when breasts become an object of the male gaze and male 'possession'" (Grosz 1994: 204), as well as to conceptualise the fluidity of breasts in terms of productive, generative capacity from the mother-subject's position, Young suggests the following:

¹²⁵ Josephy is referring to feminist politics of the 1970s, during which time breastfeeding became a fiercely contested issue. In a very generalised overview, feminist reaction to issues of maternity and the broader patriarchal oppression of women can be seen to be divided into two camps, namely so-called 'liberal feminists' and 'feminists of difference'. Concerning maternity, strategic difference between these groups is discernible. Whereas liberal feminists aimed to challenge the rhetorical construction of gender by exposing the processes by which feminine (and masculine) qualities have been naturalised through socialisation, and thereby rejected outright all forms maternal roles and representation, feminists of difference aimed their activities at the empowerment and reconstruction of maternal representation by embracing and celebrating women's reproductive capacities in an attempt to reclaim control over them. In a form of counter-essentialism, the latter group saw sexual difference not as something to be overcome or as that which differentiated from a pre-given norm, but as "pure difference...with no identity" (Grosz 1995: 54), thereby refuting binary categorisation that privileges any one term over another. With reference to Josephy's statement, breasts were thereby celebrated as a point of differentiation to men. Further, breastfeeding was largely embraced by this group, who championed it as a uniquely female experience.

My conceptualisation of a woman-centred experience of breasts is a construction, an imagining, that I will locate in the theme of desubstantialization. If we move from the male gaze in which woman is the Other, the object, the solid and the definite, to imagine the woman's point of view, the breasted body becomes blurry, mushy, indefinite, multiple, and without clear identity ... Fluids, unlike objects, have no definite borders; they are unstable, which does not mean that they are without pattern. Fluids surge and move, and a metaphysics that thinks being as fluid would tend to privilege the living, moving, pulsing over the inert dead matter of the Cartesian world view... (Young in Grosz 1994: 204-205).

Along with milk, blood is a fundamentally abject substance¹²⁶ once again intimately connected with maternity, menstrual blood in particular, due its correlation with sexual difference¹²⁷. At once a material of waste expelled from the body and a distinctive source of life, menstrual blood is in some ways analogous to the abjected mother. Aligned to this view, in an interesting comparison between the associations of fluids emanating from either the male or female body, Grosz identifies how puberty is a vastly different reference for boys and girls. For boys entering manhood, it is 'mature' sexual activity (primarily intercourse) that is emphasised during this time, over concerns of fatherhood. For girls, however, the mature female body is "dramatically overcoded with resonances of motherhood" (1994: 204-205). Grosz thus contends, "for the girl, menstruation, associated as it is with blood, with injury and the wound, with a mess that does not dry invisibly, that leaks, uncontrollable, not in sleep, in dreams, but whenever it occurs, indicates the beginning of an out-of-control status that she was led to believe ends with childhood" (1994: 205). Through its inevitable association to the indeterminate, menstrual blood, as uniquely feminine,

¹²⁶ As well as bringing to attention the ambiguous limits of the body, blood is a reminder of the finite nature of corporeality and inevitable death. Recalling the corpse as the most "sickening of wastes", Kristeva notes, "such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – cadere, cadaver" (1982: 3).

¹²⁷ Kristeva states, "menstrual blood threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference" (1982: 261).

marks women with the “stain of her future status”¹²⁸. For Grosz, this is a position of being ‘outside’, abjected, as she writes,

This necessarily marks womanhood ... as outside itself, outside its time (the time of self-contained adulthood) and place (the place of definitively within its own skin, as a self-identical being), and thus a paradoxical entity, on the very border between infancy and adulthood, nature and culture, subject and object, rational being and irrational animal (1994: 205).

It is in the *Placenta* pictures of *Confinement* that maternal blood is most vividly abject. Once again, Josephy draws particular attention to the ambivalence of these images, in which she compares the somewhat horrific nature of the fleshy, bloodied matter with the beguiling results of her method of photographing them, stating, “one sees a cathedral of membrane with light entering through the stained and weightless skin. This is in contrast to the sleek, molten surface of wounded tissue” (2006: 39)¹²⁹. A further important point of comparison is the difference between the abstracted, non-figurative placental photographs mentioned above, and the clinical objectivity of *Wrapped Placenta* (2011) (figure 6). Whereas the former placentas are entirely visceral, textures of indeterminate substances that externalise the internal in a way that collapses any sense of distinction between the two, stretching infinitely across the frame like the visualisation of the “undifferentiated maternal lining,” the latter is wholly contained, a tightly sealed film of artificial plastic wrapping and barcoded stickers that utterly betrays the materiality of membrane, sinews and flesh within. The restriction of the bound, rectangular package affirms the title of Josephy’s

¹²⁸ Kristeva also associates menstruation with ‘dirt’, creating distinctions between polluting and non-polluting bodily fluids. Following Douglas, Kristeva sees tears and, interestingly, semen, although marginal, as non-polluting fluids. In terms of fluids that defile, excrement and menstrual blood are those that elicit the reaction of abjection (Grosz 1994: 206). The distinction has to do with both the materiality of the substance’s ‘properties’ (being clear, translucent, pure or cleansing, as opposed to thick, sticky and opaque), as well as the region of the body in which they originate. In relation to the difference between male and female sexuality, Grosz explains how female sexuality is represented as an unclean, uncontrollable flow as well as “a vessel, a container, a home empty or lacking in itself but fillable from the outside, [which] has enabled men to associate women with infection, with disease, with the idea of festering putrefaction, no longer contained simply in female genitals but at any or all points of the female body” (1994: 206).

¹²⁹ Josephy notes the influence of Romantic painting and the abstract expressionism of Mark Rothko, in particular, on these deliberately non-figurative works (2006: 39). In terms of Romanticism, I feel an element of the sublime, with its incomprehensible magnitude and discomforting power, is evident in the photographs. This is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Four. Similarly, an evocation of the pulsing vibrancy and psychic gravitas of Rothko’s colour field canvases are also discernible in the *Placenta* pictures.

series, confining fleshy elements of the maternal body into an unyielding configuration.

The distinction between the placenta photographs is marked too by Josephy's vastly different psychological approach to creating the images. Whereas the former series was taken following the birth of her first child, *Wrapped Placenta* was taken after the birth of her second baby. She therefore comments,

And then the second time with this other placenta, it was a very different experience for me working with it, and I worked with it for much longer ... In terms of [a] second pregnancy, there's less trauma and you've worked through some of the stuff. And maybe because the birth was less traumatic, I was able to, quite lovingly, over the course of several days, play with that placenta before I put it in the ground. There also had been more time that had passed between the birth and... putting it in the ground. The baby was born in May last year, and I only put it in the ground on Boxing Day, in fact. And there was probably a week in which I was able to play with it in the dark room, in the studio, packaged, unpackaged. I felt I had more time and I was in a better physical and mental space to be more playful, I suppose. It sounds really weird, to be 'playful' with a placenta. So in a way I was filling in some of the gaps that I had from the first body of work. I probably maintained the same language as a result, but maybe not. I was less distanced, but more, like, loving towards it. That's the best way I can describe it (Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012).

As mentioned in a previous chapter, the placenta itself is a highly significant, indeterminate organ. Josephy can therefore be seen to make a deliberate choice in her engagement with it in terms of her recognising the conflicting, ambivalent experience of maternal embodiment. As Maher contends, the placenta presents the possibility of an organ "that does not belong to one body, but rather is turned to multiple sites, [reforming] embodied subjectivity in terms that are much more fluid". She continues, "the identity of the pregnant subject, in this reading, is not threatened through the multiplication implicit in pregnancy, but is rather expanded and altered by the shifting terrain" (2002: 97). The placenta thus refigures the relationship between

the subject and body in ways that can be, as the above quotation from Josephy shows, empowering and extremely significant.

3.3. The matricidal question: Maternity as a process without a subject?

For man and for woman the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on the way to autonomy. Matricide is our vital necessity, the sine qua non condition of our individuation (Kristeva 1982: 78).

As much as the exclusion of the abject, beginning with the rejection of the mother's body, is an essential condition of Kristeva's subject in process, so the abjected, nevertheless, must fundamentally also be tolerated. As Creed asserts, "that which threatens to destroy life also helps to define it" (1986: 56), while Kristeva contends, the "abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture." (1982: 2). Instead of viewing the matricidal premise of her writing as an annihilating, devaluing denial of the mother, it can be argued that Kristeva's treatment of the term allows it to emerge as an indispensable, generative force in the process of individuation, for both the developing subject and, in Josephy's case, the artist-becoming-mother. As Alison Stone attests, "Kristeva's emphasis on matricide ... accords with her concern to recognise the maternal body's cultural contribution. In this, Kristeva's advocacy of matricide has affinities with feminist concerns to re-value mothering and the maternal" (2012: 122).

If viewed in relation to Young's account of maternal embodiment from the perspective of the mother-subject, perhaps this matricide can be seen more as a conclusion or termination, which, although violent and painful, signals the possibility of regeneration and renewal. For example, referring to the liminal state of giving birth, Young writes:

For others the birth of the infant may be only a beginning, but for the birthing woman it is a conclusion as well. It signals the close of a process she has been undergoing for nine months, the *leaving of this unique body*

she has moved through, always surprising her a bit in its boundary changes and inner kicks. Especially if this is her first child, she experiences this birth as a transition to a new self that she may both desire and fear. She fears a loss of identity, as though on the other side of the birth she herself became a transformed person, such as she would 'never be the same again' (1984: 54. Emphasis mine).

Josephy's choice to personally partake in the burial of her infant's placentas (rather than have them disposed of by a medical institution, as is the more common western birthing practise) can be interpreted as a symbolic, ritualistic act of mourning and closure, signalling both the purposeful management of that which has been broken, and the culmination of a process. As Davidson suggests, such acts function as significant "anxiety releasing mechanisms" which restore "the social and biological equilibrium disrupted by the birth process"¹³⁰ (1985: 75). Recognising the profound disruption is, in a way, recognition too of existence as a transitional state¹³¹. For Josephy, the process of taking photographs, like the ritual of burial, is perhaps an active way of reclaiming a sense of stability, albeit transformed and temporary, following the rupture that has occurred. That the photographs have an indexical relationship to the past and bind a specific body in time, no matter how

¹³⁰ A full investigation of the psychosocial implications of placenta burial as well as the variations that exist between cultures in which the practise occurs is beyond the scope of this thesis. For more information, see Davidson's "The Shadow of Life: Psychosocial Explanations for Placenta Rituals" 1985.

¹³¹ Kristeva's description of pregnant embodiment in *Women's Time* is an apt articulation of a fluid, transitional state, in which the pregnant subject intersects "spheres of language and instinct" is thereby able to "[renew] connection to the repressed, pre-conscious, pre-symbolic aspect of existence" (Young 2005: 53). For Kristeva, this ability, particular to the 'becoming-mother', is one that is utterly disruptive of subjectivity. Kristeva describes the biological and psychological processes of maternity with reference to a loss of subjectivity in the following passage: "Cells fuse, split, and proliferate; volumes grow, tissues stretch, and body fluids change rhythm, speeding up or slowing down. Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other. And no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on. 'It happens, but I'm not there.' 'I cannot realise it, but it goes on.' Motherhood's impossible syllogism" (Kristeva in Grosz 1998: 79.).

discontinuous, further recalls an aspect of *memento mori*¹³². In this way, the images could be seen to function as part of a commemorative act, a form of mourning for a temporary “loss of, or transformation of, one’s self” (Liss 2013: <http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk/editorial.html>) that has occurred throughout pregnancy and in the act of birthing, as the embodied state of interdependence and relationality reaches its violent conclusion. Instead of being dissolved by the process of maternity, however, such experiences emphasise the dynamic transience of an identity that does not rely on an always coherent, always contained corporeality.

It is important to note that it is not through pregnancy that Kristeva’s subject finds her identity or femininity as a woman. Rather, the woman-mother’s identity is betrayed by pregnancy as her position within the symbolic is destabilised by that which “threatens to collapse a signifying system based on the paternal law of differentiation ... [it] automatically throws into question ideas concerning self, boundaries between self and other, and hence identity” (Doane 1987: 170). In resituating the space of the maternal body, Kristeva has managed to present this space as one of conflict and difference. As Linda Zerilli notes, “At the very place (the maternal body) where the male scientist, the physician, the priest, and the philosopher inscribe blissful coexistence of the mother-and-child-to-be... this symbolic recasting of the maternal body as a battleground on which the struggle for female subjectivity is fought works to disrupt cultural assumptions about women as the passive bearer of a species teleology” (1992: 119). It is perhaps precisely because of this potential to occupy a borderline position, of crossing a threshold of not one yet not two bodies, nature and

¹³² The phrase *Memento mori* (Latin: “Remember that you will die”) is generally associated with artistic or symbolic reminders of mortality or the inevitability of death. Particularly strong within Christian iconography whose emphasis on divine judgement brought death to the forefront of consciousness, the painted *memento mori* of the Middle Ages and Renaissance depicted general themes about the inevitability of death with a strong moralising purpose. With the development of photography in the nineteenth century, *memento mori* took the form of death portraits of deceased family members. According to Dan Meinwald (1990), the images represent a transformed concept of mourning within a growing culture of individualism and self-definition (<http://vv.arts.ucla.edu/terminals/meinwald/meinwald1.html>. Accessed 15 June 2013). The relationship between photography and *memento mori* has been well theorised by writers such as Susan Sontag in *On Photography* (1973) and Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1980), with Sontag commenting, “All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt” (1973: 15).

culture, that representation of the maternal subject remains so ambivalent and the maternal subject, an object of abjection.

A recurring interest for Kristeva is the way in which the necessary abjection of the mother – “our separation from her in order to become individualised, to take objects, to enter language, to become good citizens of the family and social world” (Caslav Corvino 2004: 21) – is misdirected as an abjection of women in general. This misplaced abjection has been one of the reasons for women’s historical and continued oppression. By reducing women to “maternity” or their reproductive function only, it follows that as the maternal function is that which must be abjected, so, within patriarchy, are women, maternity, and femininity all abjected along with this function. It is therefore through the maternal that the feminine becomes ‘other’, projected outside of the self, “as man’s reassuring, externalized difference from himself” (Zerilli 1992: 126). In “Stabat Mater”, Kristeva therefore elucidates on the ways in which the threatening power of the other, and thus the mother’s body, is brought under control or repressed through the authority of religion, morality, politics and language. Disrupting her own narrative with “stream of consciousness soliloquies” (Caslav Corvino 2004: 22) regarding the maternal experience, Kristeva suggests, however, that it is the pregnant woman who remains “a figure of the doubling of self into other, and the eventual splitting of the self into the other, a figure that bespeaks both the identification of the self with the other, and the negation of the self in the other that makes the recognition of the other possible” (Caslav Corvino 2004: 22)¹³³.

Young’s account of pregnant embodiment takes up Kristeva’s description of the ‘splitting’ of the female subject, but does so in a way that positions this split as active, constructive and of a unique temporality. She attests,

¹³³ The recognition of the other within forms the basis of Kristeva’s ‘heretical ethics’. Kristeva proposes an heretical ethics as that which embraces the other, the different, in its future-orientated destabilisation of the status quo. Kristeva presents an embodied subjectivity that is never coherent, but rather becomes “dissolved in relation to each other... tak[ing] meaning from others whose significance we in turn project” (Jones 1997: 44). As Kelly Oliver explains, “Just as Kristeva brings the speaking body back into language by putting language in the body, she brings the subject into the place of the other by putting the other in the subject. Just as the pattern and logic of language are already found within the body, the pattern and logic of alterity are already found within the subject” (2004: 3. <http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkinsguidetoliterarytheory/juliakristeva.html>).

For the pregnant subject, pregnancy has a temporality of movement, growth and change. The pregnant subject is not simply a splitting in which the two halves lie open and still, but a dialectic. The pregnant woman experiences herself as a source and participant in a creative process. Though she does not plan and direct it, neither does it merely wash over her; rather, she is this process, this change. Time stretches out, moments and days take on a depth because she experiences more changes in herself, her body. Each day, each week, she looks at herself for signs of transformation (Young 1984: 54).

Maternity is thus a process in a forever transient subjectivity; it does not equate the subject but is instead a visible metaphor of the subject's ambivalent positioning (Boulos Walker 1998: 145). An ambiguous state, its sensuous, pre-Oedipal attachments challenge a fixed conception of identity, yet also highlight the way in which identity, as Christine Battersby notes, "erupts from the flesh" of the mother's body (1998: 39).

It is for this reason, as Doane suggests, that "patriarchal society invests so heavily in the construction and maintenance of motherhood as an identity with very precise functions – comforting, nurturing, protecting" (1987: 83). In Kristeva's words, "Man overcomes the unthinkable of death by postulating maternal love in its place" (in Doane 1987: 252). Maternal desire as de-eroticized and centred exclusively in the child is an "ideological veil" over the "barely covered abyss where our identities, images, and words run the risk of being engulfed" (1987: 42). Simone de Beauvoir similarly contends "If he is anxious to believe her pure and chaste, it is... because of his refusal to see her as a body" (in Zerilli 1992: 129). In acknowledging the mother as carnal being, so the threatening awareness of the subject's own corporeality, as well as his mortality, disrupts his sense of coherent identity as "like a pure Idea, like the One, the All, the Absolute Spirit" (Beauvoir in Zerilli 1992: 129).

Shildrick asserts that by recovering the maternal and recognising the significance of the intertwined corporeality of one with the other preceding the emergence and constitution of subjectivity, so "our common – albeit largely disavowed – maternal origin could ground new forms of the imaginary in which subjectivity is marked not by

an inflexible reflective interval that locks the binary and self and other into the model of the selfsame, but by the closeness and fluidity of that first embrace which speaks to the contiguity between subjects” (2010: 2). Irigaray concurs, “The internal and external horizon of my skin interpenetrating with yours wears away their edges, their limits, their solidity. Creating another space – outside my framework. An opening of openness” (in Shildrick 2010: 2).

The desire to ‘create’ within the space of maternity directly articulates one of the challenges of *Confinement* - how to be creative throughout the process of maternity in a manner that speaks to different figurations of the self. As Josephy attests, “... it’s a creative moment, the moment in which you ‘make’ the baby or ‘have’ the baby. You are creating something and yet, in many ways, you are not permitted to create about that creation - unless you’re going to make nice Anne Geddes¹³⁴ pictures of your babies looking cute” (Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012). In formulating (and answering, through *Confinement*), this question, Josephy demonstrates the cultural potential of the generative space of maternity, which has always-already been foreclosed by the masculine symbolic sublimation or abjection of it. By bringing maternal embodiment into the symbolic, *Confinement* forces a reconsideration of most key philosophical questions: “Registering that philosophy needs to theorize a self capable of giving birth to new subjects from within its own flesh transforms key questions of ethics, political theory and aesthetics, as well as ontology itself” (Battersby 2006: 297).

¹³⁴ Anne Geddes is an Australian-born photographer, designer and businesswoman who now lives and works in New Zealand. She is best known for her overtly sentimental, stylized depictions of babies and motherhood. Typical images show babies or young children dressed as fairies and fairytale creatures, flowers, or small animals. Geddes has been hugely commercially successful, selling over 18-million books and 13-million calendars, and being published in 83 countries worldwide. Authors such as Holland (2004) are highly critical of Geddes, arguing her photographs “exploit the irrational fetishization” of the Romantic innocent child image by “drawing attention to the disconnection between childhood and its associations in dragging babies ‘into the realms of the bizarre and grotesque” (in Olsen & Rampaul 2013: 24).

3.4. Conclusion

It would seem that in *Confinement*, Josephy seeks to make visible the tangible effects of the conflicting, fragmented identities of the maternal subject, offering an “object of female subjectivity experiencing and identifying itself” (Irigaray in Battersby 2006: 307). The series presents an account of maternity that is imbued with tension; using the materiality of the ‘natural’ body, Josephy transforms maternity from an expression of female ‘nature’ into something strange and profoundly denaturalised. The maternal body itself becomes the tool of this resignification, resulting in a destabilisation of symbolic norms and the articulation of an alternative identity; a subject “independently embodied” while simultaneously “one that fundamentally disturbs the model of the disembodied unitary self of western logic” (Betterton 2002: 266).

Confinement can thus be seen to emphasise the “paradoxes of the flesh”, investing the photographs with a peculiar, arresting power precisely because they seek to “link creativity with materiality and with the flesh” (Battersby 2006: 307)¹³⁵. As Battersby believes, while “some women artists and writers’ portrayal of pregnancy and birth can be over-sweet; in other female artists the sense of horror at feeling oneself alienation from one’s own conscious freedom is palpable ... however, the most interesting group of women artists and writers are those who manage to convey this fleshy tension in what they create” (2006: 300). It is surely to this last category of artists that Josephy belongs. In an intensely personal engagement, *Confinement* offers a site of possibility for reconfiguring maternal embodiment from the point of view of the maternal subject and in a way that values the body differently. Through the aestheticised images of bodily trauma that embrace the visceral in a manner at once deeply personal and estranged, the series confronts the ambivalence of both abjection and the physical process of becoming-mother. In so doing, the work explores the tensions and contradictions of maternal representation and, potentially,

¹³⁵ This reference is from an article by Battersby entitled “Flesh Questions: Representational Strategies and the Cultures of Birth” 2006 in which she investigates the work of Paula Modersohn-Becker, Frida Kahlo and Helen Chadwick. This particular statement is made in reference to Chadwick’s work, *One Flesh* 1985, but is, I feel, equally applicable to *Confinement*.

offers new figurations of what Rosi Braidotti has called a 'materialist theory of becoming' (in Betterton 2006: 83).

In their interrogation of prior conceptions of psychoanalytic theory and visual representation of the maternal body respectively, Kristeva and Josephy can thus equally be seen to disrupt the relationship between this body and signification. For both, troubling of established positions presents the means to a renewed understanding of the subject. By calling into question traditional orders of social existence, their projects are similarly committed to re-representing, to making strange, accepted notions of the maternal subject. Josephy's ambiguous, affective images of vulnerability and instability thus offer a 'productive violence' against accepted norms of representation of the maternal subject. By aligning itself to the notion of 'affirmative abjection', *Confinement* can be seen to renegotiate social relations through a visual account of a 'lived bodily experience'. This is used in an attempt to actively reclaim the maternal subject, to come to terms with the violence and the intense feelings of abjection that silencing of the maternal has effected. Through this newfound voice, an alternative sense of embodied subjectivity is negotiated, resulting in a more empowered relation between self and other. By reconfiguring the maternal body outside the patriarchal ideal, Josephy attempts a more diverse, plural and inclusive representation of maternal subjectivity. Defying the constricting boundaries between inside and outside, selves and others, such progressive forms of representation threaten the stability of the patriarchal symbolic, and may indeed help to create a space for recognising the power of maternal creativity.

CHAPTER 4: *CONFINEMENT*

Reframing the maternal subject

An outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, [. . .]. I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either (Beckett in Wehling-Giorgi 2011: 91).

And my skin, my skin is ripping apart, veins and stretch marks tattoo me as membranes give way, a dark line runs from navel to crotch where walls of muscle slowly separate. Leaky vessel, I might split apart at any moment, pouring myself onto the floor in bits. I am not metaphor, but real alien becoming, perpetually modified (Tyler in Ahmed et al 2000: 290).

This final chapter undertakes a close reading of *Confinement* to explore how Josephy's visual strategy reframes the maternal body to radically deny the construct of the maternal ideal outlined in previous chapters. The specific formal choices, together with the unyielding, disruptive, self-surveying gaze that connects the diverse images within the series, destabilize highly recognisable visual codes and situate the artist in an intimate yet critical relation to her body. Confronting "broken boundaries of the violated body ... whose parts are displayed as residues of violence and/or trauma" (Foster 1996: 152)¹³⁶, Josephy uses the disintegration of the body to produce images that rupture the illusionary wholeness and stability upon which naturalised maternity relies¹³⁷. The penetrating scrutiny of the photographs

¹³⁶ This description is taken from Hal Foster's "The Return of the Real" 1996 in which Foster discusses the return to the materiality of actual bodies and social sites evident in contemporary art practise and theory. In my view, it is a description equally appropriate to *Confinement*.

¹³⁷ In some ways, this can be read as a near reversal of Lacan's theory of subjectivity. In an oversimplified explanation, Lacan proposes that a series of negative images encountered by the infant within the imaginary need to be suppressed successfully in order for subjective development to be achieved. "Castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body, in short ... *imagos of the fragmented body*" (Lacan in Shildrick 2007: 231), the corps morcelé referred to earlier, are thus the "forms of embodiment that must be suppressed in order for the child to achieve the stability and distinction that mark out the normatively embodied subject" (Shildrick 2007: 231). By confronting the images of bodily fragmentation

undoubtedly effects a deep personal involvement, while paradoxically a sense of estrangement from the violent processes of parturition and becoming-mother is presented. As such, recognition is given to the space of the pregnant and birthing body, and indeed the maternal subject, as one of transition and rupture, challenging those restrictive modes of motility that confine the feminine in the world (Young in Maher 2002: 102).

Notwithstanding the formal distinctions between the images, there is a definite sense of coherence to *Confinement*. The photographs' deliberate engagement with the abject "mother-matter" of the parturient body is united by the aforementioned curious interplay of detached observation and intimate engagement on the part of the artist. Josephy has a particular interest in the genre of documentary photography, with much of her work deliberately employing and parodying this photographic tradition as a means of exposing the phallogentric foundations on which it is built¹³⁸. The feeling of intense scrutiny in the *Confinement* images extends this rationale; using the language of documentary imagery, Josephy forces viewers into a dispassionate, utterly unsentimental close encounter with the abject particulars of her own maternal body to wholly destabilise the deeply encoded claims of 'objectivity' within this genre.

Taking into account the Foucauldian view of the power relations inherent within this particular visual tradition, by which documentary photographs are associated with particular, gendered 'regimes of truth'¹³⁹, Josephy utilises the confrontational language of 'masculine truth' to undermine the very patriarchal symbolic order it purportedly supports. The images of *Confinement* thus both echo and contest masculine discourses, particularly the medicalisation of the body experienced throughout the birthing process. As her body was monitored, probed, injected, sliced open, pulled apart and sutured together again, so Josephy now undertakes a highly detailed, visual investigation into the physical effects thereof. The decidedly affecting result is a radical subversion of the contrived, naturalised relationship between

precipitated by pregnancy and birth, Josephy exposes the limitations of such models to the maternal subject, whose embodiment is distinctly 'other' to the "normative subject" and whose subjectivity is thus always necessarily *unstable* and *indistinct*.

¹³⁸ This has been a specific area of interest in Josephy's research and visual arts practise and formed the basis of her Masters of Fine Arts. *Twin Town* 2007 is an example of a series that explores these issues.

¹³⁹ See Vettel-Becker 2005; Rose 2010; Rosler, 1989; Sekula, 1986; Tagg, 1988.

maternal discourse and the body. Instead, it is the raw and violent products of motherhood that are so searchingly (and surgically) uncovered, suggesting an entirely differently imagined topography of the maternal body to popular notions and naturalised ideals.

There are three distinct styles of photographs discernible within the *Confinement* series as covered within this thesis, by which certain images are able to be grouped together according to their formal similarities. For ease of reference from here onwards, when discussing the groups more generally I will refer to them under the following headers: *Placenta Pictures* (2005; 2011), *After Birth Pieces* (2005; 2011) and *Maternal Presence* (2005) photographs¹⁴⁰. I will undertake close readings of selected images from all three groups, as well as draw comparisons and contrasts between them where applicable. As previously mentioned, the titles of individual works across these groups are highly relevant and function as crucial interpretative markers. In some instances, without the specificity of these labels many viewers would most likely not recognise what it is that has been photographed. The abject nature of many of the works is therefore confirmed or, in some cases, only revealed by the titles, heightening the ambivalent and confrontational element of work by which the “lure of voyeurism turn[s] around like a trap” (Mulvey 1991: 142) to challenge the viewer.

Despite the works’ unmistakably disturbing quality however, the images are not merely repellent; the explicit photographs combine allusions to intense distress and pain with an equally acute sense of awe that expose the process of ‘becoming-mother’ as wholly disturbing and, for the most part, unnatural, yet with a sensitivity and poignancy of one who has been fundamentally altered by the experience. Josephy thus draws on photography for its cathartic effect in her own healing process, at the same time as she recognises the disruptive potential presented by

¹⁴⁰ The construction and designation of these sub-groups within *Confinement* is my own undertaking, not that of the artist. Of the photographs included in the article in *Artworks in Progress* and in this thesis, Josephy does however comment on two distinct series’ within the group, being those images which investigate the “immediate visceral products of motherhood” and those “which record the effects of birth on the body” (2006: 38). The first group mentioned by Josephy thus refers to the both the *Placenta Pictures* and *After Birth Pieces*. I have, however, decided to further distinguish between these images due to their distinctly contrasting formal characteristics, as will be revealed within my analysis.

representations of the female body for her more political aims. As she states, “Clearly, given the profoundly political nature of obstetric and postpartum discourse, any discussion within this arena must be linked to the politics of sex and motherhood” (2006: 35). By drawing attention to that which is either included or excluded from frameworks of ‘acceptable’ maternal representation, following Kristeva, Josephy brings abjection to the fore as a means to expose the structural and political acts that establish the foundations of social existence (Tyler 2007: 79). *Confinement* is thus a project of “intensive critical investment” in which the creation of images of the maternal subject “move[s] towards a more critical political methodology while maintaining a personalised engagement” (Josephy 2006: 39). As such, *Confinement* presents a powerful counter-discourse to the cultural stereotypes and restricted representations of the maternal subject that Josephy sets out to undermine. In many ways, the images can be read as an exposition of the liminality of pregnancy, exploring its precariousness through an unusual contradiction of formal, visual convention superseded by a highly individualised approach to the unlikely subject matter, through which the work undoubtedly gains transgressive potential.

4.1. “Cathedral[s] of...stained and weightless skin”: The *Placenta Pictures*

Here is an organ that exists only in this process of pregnancy, only as a mode of exchange between two entities. It is expelled after the period of gestation, discarded by both bodies at the time of birth, becoming useless at the point at which they become – materially, figuratively, representationally – two bodies instead of one. It is an organ that offends against the concept of bodily integrity, in and of itself. It acts for two sites of body, provisionally. It has a discrete temporal location, after which is it exhausted. Yet, this organ resists transferability or recreation ... it cannot be extracted, re-routed or resituated. It can only exist at the point of intersection between two corporeal sites sharing one bodily space, and it can only exist there as long as this related corporeality continues. It connects them, but belongs to neither, and can only exist for and at the site of the two (Maher 2002: 103-104).

As the threshold between two corporeal entities at which the activity and excessive force of the pregnant body is most clearly articulated, it is particularly apt that Josephy chose to work with the placenta as the most graphic means to contest recognizable and comfortable visual cartographies of the maternal body¹⁴¹. Following the argument presented by Maher that “the placenta offers, in both material and metaphorical terms, a way to begin thinking through the impasse of pregnant representation” (2002: 96), this vital yet transitory organ can be seen to operate as a “‘productive nexus’ through which a tension between connection and distinction is maintained and explored” (Maher 2002: 101). The photographs in the *Placenta Pictures* certainly seem to capture this tension, vividly confirming the corporeality of the maternal subject while simultaneously depicting its perpetual dissolution.

Despite their obvious engagement with abjection and the works’ graphic exposure of the interiority of the body, I do not believe that the *Placenta Pictures* should be read as a narrative of revulsion and horror brought about via the disintegration of the female form, nor as an identification with misogynistic disgust for the female body that reiterates “connotations of fear and loathing around the biological processes” associated with that body (Russo in Betterton 2006: 95). By deliberately engaging with the very object that connects mother to foetus in a profoundly ‘real’, atavistic manner, while evidently valuing the organ’s aesthetic qualities and treating it with a unique sensitivity, I instead consider Josephy to be questioning the source of cultural anxiety directed at this body, and the resultant need to so narrowly confine visual representation thereof. By radically distancing the maternal subject from protected idealisations of naturalised motherhood, Josephy instead presents a politics of the body that subverts the problematic and “historically confining aesthetic” (Betterton 2011: 262) of not just maternity, but broader femininity.

The first of the *Placenta Pictures* (Figure 5) consists of a triptych of bloodied membrane and flesh. The “stained and weightless skin” (Josephy 200: 39) is stretched across the entirety of each image surface, creating unbounded, luminous

¹⁴¹ Taking into account Linda Nead’s view that “all transitional states... pose a threat: anything that resists classification or refuses to belong to one category or another emanates danger. And once again it is the margins, the very edges of categories that are most critical in the construction of symbolic meaning” (1992: 6), the use of the placenta as a means of renegotiating maternal identity is indeed significant.

planes that radiate with the vitality of living matter. With a total size of 2250x1160mm, each image is small enough to retain a sense of intimacy, yet large enough to create a presence - the glow of warm, saturated colours and alluring textural surfaces achieve an enigmatic beauty that invites deeper study, enticing viewers with their beguiling display. The gross materiality of the images engenders uncertainty, however, epitomising the threat of indeterminacy and the dissolution of borders so central to Kristeva's abject. The combination of the formal choices of tight, close-up shots and intense, seductive lighting together threaten to engulf the viewer as the marbled, visceral matter flows beyond the image frame, advancing outwards in a manner that radically collapses any sense of literal or emotional distance in the work. In this way, the visual field becomes an abject landscape of elemental human substance, a "sleek molten surface of wounded tissue" (Josephy 1996: 39), exposing a phantasmatic topography of the inner maternal body.

Taken after the birth of Josephy's first child, these images of raw, meaty substance invoke the most extreme, and in many ways, disturbing, conception of the body turned inside out. Within such representations, "the subject is literally abjected, thrown out" (Foster 1996: 112) as "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 1982: 3) assumes its place. With reference to the feeling of intense enquiry that pervades *Confinement*, however, it can similarly be argued that this dramatic exposure of the internal is also "the condition of the outside turning in, of the invasion of the subject-as-picture by the object-gaze" (Foster 1996: 112). As Josephy's lens explores the mutilated surfaces of that which was once a part of her, yet simultaneously belongs to another being, her very sense of identity as an autonomous, undivided subject is called into question, or even "dissolved[,] because the fundamental distinction between figure and ground, self and other, is lost" (Foster 1996: 112).

The left-hand image of the triptych is possibly the most innocuous of the three included in this piece, and it is here that the influence of Rothko and Andres Serrano¹⁴² - acknowledged by Josephy (2006) - can most clearly be seen. The

¹⁴² An American artist renowned for his photographs of bodily products, Serrano's (b. 1950) use of bodily fluids, including blood, urine, milk and later semen, in his overlapping *Body Fluids* and *Immersion* 1985-90 series' clearly situates his work within the term 'Abject Art' as used in Chapter Three. His large-format photographs cite

paper-thin expanse of translucent skin, streaked with fine rivulets of blood, creates a curve of warm, glowing light. The photograph gently blurs at the edges, accentuating the sharply focussed, saturated red and yellow surface of the membrane's most delicate section. In creating this image, one can imagine the artist treating the placenta with a reverence that verges upon an invocation of the sublime¹⁴³; it is subtly imbued with a sense of appreciation, not only for the purpose of the life-sustaining organ itself, but also for its aesthetic potential and somewhat incongruous visual appeal. The dual attitude of respect and intrigue with which Josephy seems to approach the object makes it seem intimate despite its rather abhorrent nature, contradicting the invasive manner in which it was removed from her body and its usual termination as a dismissed material of 'medical waste'.

The central photograph in the triptych, with its slippery ganglion of smooth, white cord spilling forth like a disembowelled intestine, is notably more disturbing than the first image as the gleaming viscera of flesh is resolutely interrogated by Josephy's eye. Again, precise formal choices are made to emphasise the surface texture of the meat-like substance; the foreground of umbilical cord pulling down on the bloodied edge of coiling, visceral matter is sharply focussed, as the elements reflect the bright sheen of studio lighting off their glossiest areas. The seductive technique parodies the visual language of product advertising, as the slick surfaces and gleaming textures lure the viewer ever-deeper into the picture plane. Like guide ropes, the two marbled, pallid bands lead the eye inwards towards the chasm beyond, its lumpy surface a sponged network of veins and tubes still discernible despite the photograph's incredibly short depth of field. A graphic visualisation of gelatinous, corporeal substance, in this photograph the most abject elements of the maternal body are disgorged beyond the image borders like the bodily fluids that so resolutely betray the 'clean and proper' self. As the surface textures exceed the rational frame of the work, so the image threatens to overwhelm the viewer, forcing the eye to

fields of advertising, fashion, pornography and 'high art' to create seductive, highly aestheticised images, notwithstanding the abject matter employed. (http://rogallery.com/serrano_andres.html). Although formal similarities can be drawn between Serrano's work and the *Placenta Pictures*, a fundamental distinction as noted by Josephy, is that *Confinement* is "invested with a more private take on the subject" (2006: 38), as it is her *own* body, her *own* fluids that are photographed.

¹⁴³ Kristeva writes of the abject as "Edged with the Sublime" (in Foster 1996: 115) – a notion evoked by this photograph. A more in depth discussion of the sublime element of the *Placenta Pictures* follows within this chapter.

“scan the surface, searching for a specific shape or pattern that might offer some formal reassurance against the disturbing content” (Mulvey 1991: 145). There is nothing sentimental about this image – the ‘clean and proper’ body has been turned inside out, exposed in all its uncontainable rawness in a manner that undoubtedly brings the liminality and precariousness of human embodiment to the fore.

The third image in the triptych is perhaps the most reminiscent of a slab of meat, as bands and congealed lumps of pale, ‘fat’ run through the fleshy matter, drawing a contrast between the subtle pinks of foreground substance and the indefinable, dark puce mass beyond. Again the various unfamiliar textures are accentuated by their disparity. The immense tactility of the slippery, lumpy foreground stands out in particular, with its bulges and strands of sinew enticing the viewer through their indeterminate materiality. In contrast, the smooth, bright stain of red in the top right-hand corner of the image glows with an abstract beauty that betrays its reality as leaking blood, spilling from the placenta’s vessels onto the hard, plastic surface of the Perspex tray. This slow-seeping stain pulls the image towards the first, creating a sense of coherency and unity across the three frames.

It is significant that Josephy writes of a “*cathedral of membrane*” (2006: 39. Emphasis mine) to describe the *Placenta Pictures*. With associations of grandeur, vastness, and shifting facets of subtle light, the image is a highly evocative, emotionally charged one that seems a fitting expression of these photographs, with their aesthetic so highly reminiscent of stained glass windows. Further, these sacred structures are most often regarded as spaces of reverence and reflection, inspiring a spiritual response from visitors that can at times be unsettling or enveloping. This aspect is evident in the *Placenta Pictures* too, in which colour and form become an inseparable, layered depth, evocative of an intense emotional encounter rather than a figurative portrayal. The works invite contemplation at the same time as their abjectness repels the viewer’s gaze, intruding beyond borders of acceptability with a sense of attraction and physical discomfort that embodies the “vortex of summons” so aptly described by Kristeva (1982: 1).

Returning to the notion of the sublime, Josephy's placental photographs can arguably be seen to evoke the aesthetic experience of the material sublime¹⁴⁴. With an emphasis on the embodied and experiential aspects of the sublime encounter, the material sublime "accepts the relationship of both pleasure and pain, or life and death, and the potential dispersal of the self. [It] does not stand for an encounter with magnificence of mountain peaks and 'piling-up clouds' – as it did for Burke and Kant – but rather for a meeting with the incalculable alterity of the other"¹⁴⁵ (Zylinka in du Preez 2010: 410). In a description that resonates with Kristeva's theorisation of abjection and the ambivalence with which it challenges the subject, Zylinka continues,

The alterity of the other, both fascinating and threatening to the unity of the self, is the starting point of the ethics of the [material] sublime. ... The self no longer remains 'at certain distances' from its source of enticement and fascination, but rather embarks on a fearful encounter

¹⁴⁴ The term 'material sublime' was coined by the British Romantic poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge as a derogative critique of the crude, sensual theatricality and sensationalism of the dramas by German poet Friedrich Schiller (du Preez 2010; Vine 2002). The classical sublime, on the other hand, refers to the eighteenth-century romantic conception of the sublime as articulated by the Irish writer Edmund Burke in "A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful" 1756. In this influential treatise, Burke defines the sublime as "Whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime. That is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (in Ohlin 2002: 23). The transcendental aspect of the sublime is extended in Immanuel Kant's "Critique of Judgement" 1790, which valorises the mind (Reason) over the material (Imagination) and through this disembodiment, "installed the scene of [the] sublime in and as an agon of the subject's mental faculties" (Vine 2002: 238). As Amanda du Preez explains, the material sublime is thus "a counter-discourse or sub-discourse within the classical sublime that describes the sublime encounter in immanent (physical) as well as transcendent (metaphysical) terms, as opposed to the classical sublime that concentrates mainly on the transcendent or supersensible aspects" (2010: 410). Du Preez notes further how, as "an ontologically engaged and phenomenologically contextualised encounter with overwhelming materiality" (2010: 396), the material sublime exists as "other" to the classical sublime, reminding it of its own corpo(real)ity" (ibid). For Pipkin, the material sublime is "not a discrete aesthetic category distinct from or diametrically opposed to the transcendental sublime. Rather, the material sublime is always already embedded within the discourse of the transcendental sublime" (1998: 601). For a more detailed explanation of the distinction between the material and classical sublime, see du Preez (2010), Vine (2002) and Pipkin (1998).

¹⁴⁵ Following *Romanticism and Gender* (1993) in which the author Anne K. Mellor undertakes a feminist reading of the sublime and formulates an alternative aesthetic discourse thereof to apply to the work of women Romantic writers, Zylinka refers to the material sublime as the "feminine" or "domestic" sublime. The essentialist assumption of such synonyms is clear, and has in turn been criticised by writers such as Barbara Claire Freeman (1997), who argues that the feminine sublime does not represent an "innate femininity or unique style of women's writing" (in Pipkin 1998: 599). Although the gender paradigm of the material sublime needs to be recognised, further discussion thereof is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, in order to avoid perpetuating the limitations of the essentialist association of the terms, I will only refer to the "material" sublime within my writing.

with the other who poses a threat to its integrity but also offers a promise of bliss (Ibid).

The encountered 'otherness' of the *Placenta Pictures* is made all the more disturbing by the fact that it is (in part) the subject's own flesh that is photographed. As the artist confronts 'self as other', manifested by the unavoidable corporeality of her body's own abjected parts, established binaries of interiority and exteriority, activity and excess, form and formlessness are negated, producing immense discord¹⁴⁶ while simultaneously emphasising the materiality of the physical world and our encounters within it. The sense of dissolution of the body paradoxically threatens to engulf the viewer, so relentless and palpably corporeal is the fleshy landscape portrayed. The unbound sensuality of stretched tissue and overflowing elements spilling beyond the borders of the *Placenta Pictures* invoke a terrifying vastness¹⁴⁷, their excessive, leaking, molten state suggesting infinity of flesh, a formlessness that is unable to be contained.

The physical breakdown evident within the images resonates with an understanding of the material sublime as "eventhood", "more an act than an object ... an aesthetics of incompleteness, process and becoming" (Vine 2002: 242). Indeed the temporality of the *Placenta Pictures* is complex and ambiguous. While the impermanence of this critical organ is highlighted by its very presence outside the body and as an 'object' of the photograph, essentially the placenta is an entity of process. Involving multiple sites of mother and child, it visualises gestation, expansion, a transitory interconnectedness and the fluidity of subjective framing (Palmer 2009: 77). At the

¹⁴⁶ The notion of discord forms the basis of Kant's sublime as read by Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze construes how Kant discovers the sublime in the "fundamental discord" between the subject's faculties; these being, for Kant, the "faculty of presentation" (Imagination) and the "faculty of concepts" (Reason) (in Vine 2002: 239). As Vine explains further, "In Kant, when the imagination (always for him a sensuously synthesizing faculty) is unable to 'present' to the mind an image of something that exceeds its synthetic grasp – say, a mountain, a sea, a desert, the heavens – the faculty of 'reason' takes over in a thinking of the totality or infinity of the object that the imagination fails to grasp empirically. A bifurcation thus opens up in the faculties of the subject between the sensuous and the rational, or the imagination and reason, in an irreducibly equivocal experience of pain for the imagination and pleasure for the faculty of thought. The 'sublime', then, becomes a rational exceeding of the project of sensuous presentation in the subject's experience of a simultaneous (rational) elevation and (sensuous) deprivation" (2002: 239). Discord is however, equally applicable to an encounter of the material sublime.

¹⁴⁷ In his thesis on the sublime, Burke outlined several basic attributes thereof, one of the most conspicuous being vastness.

same time, these images are the most atavistic of the series. There is something archaic about the placental photographs, conveyed by the monumental expanses of viscera and blood, which reminds us of the transience of flesh, the immutable inevitability of death that infects the living¹⁴⁸. Further, in “Stabat Mater”, Kristeva describes how the act of childbirth and the accompanying expulsion of two bodies, the infant and the placenta, exists on the border of life and death. As Jenkins explains, “The infant goes on in the world of the living while the placenta, which quite literally keeps the fetus alive during nine months in the womb, is left to die” (2006: 94). Kristeva thus writes, “Frozen placenta, live limb of skeleton, monstrous graft of life on myself, a living dead. Life [...] death [...] undecidable. During delivery it went to the left with the afterbirth” (in Jenkins 2006: 95). These fundamental stages thus become interdependent in maternity, as “in labour, then, the mother births both life and death (Jenkins 2006: 95). Returning to Zylinka’s earlier description and as “a domain of experience that resists categorization ... a crisis in relation to language and representation that the subject undergoes” (Korsemeier in du Preez 2010: 410), the material sublime is thus evoked within these images via the powerful interplay of transformation and permanence, life and death, that involves the subject both intimately and violently, disrupting the body and sense of self, and for which there is no prior visual or conceptual reference.

In divulging the “irrepressible materiality of the event” (Pipkin in du Preez 2010: 403), Josephy highlights the ways in which the body has largely been denied in visual traditions of the maternal subject, exposing the limitations of existing categories of representation available from which to speak of her experience. By foregrounding the threatening corporeality of becoming-mother, her images resist naturalisation, “suspend[ing] the categories of the known and the familiar, and impos[ing] a state of surprise, shock, strangeness and privation upon the subject” (Lyotard in Vine 2002: 247). While it can surely be argued that the intense identification with the material

¹⁴⁸ In this way the flesh and blood within the images recall Kristeva’s theorisation of the universal horror of the corpse as the most extreme form of abjection, “the most sickening of wastes” (1982: 3). Embodying “death infecting life” the corpse belongs to “the other side of the border” (Kristeva 1982: 3). An intolerable reminder of our inevitable mortality, it “*show[s]* me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live ... Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, *cadaver*” (ibid). As Grosz explains, “[the corpse] is intolerable because, in representing the very border between life and death, it shifts this limit or boundary into the heart of life itself” (1989: 75).

world embodied by the *Placenta Pictures* recalls the fear and anxiety evoked by the physical “real-ness” of the sublime encounter, in my view Josephy is neither subsumed by nor wishes to exert complete control over the materiality the placenta represents¹⁴⁹. Instead these images represent a means of taking up “a position of respect in response to an incalculable otherness” (Freeman in Pipkin 1998: 599), recognising a new form of being in the world caused by an intense corporeal experience that “opens on to the unrepresentable, on to what explodes established protocols of being and meaning, on to what does not (as yet) have a name” (Vine 2002: 247).

What makes Josephy’s placental images so radical is their visualisation of the interconnectedness between two beings in a manner that values the aesthetic qualities thereof while wholly negating or perhaps re-negotiating the affectionate, sentimental relationship between mother and infant. The intimate representation of the abject interior of the body presents the placenta as a “shifting, mutable ‘corporeal terrain’” that is inherently ambiguous and challenging (Palmer 2009: 77). The photographs contest constructions of “bounded individuality” and rather re-emphasize “interconnections – both physiological and social” (Palmer 2009: 77). By so doing, Josephy refigures the relationship between subject and body more generally, by which inflexible binaries cannot be maintained, “remind[ing] viewers of the interconnections between maternal subjectivity, pregnant embodiment and fetuses” (Palmer 2009: 77). As Maher suggests,

Pregnancy, in this reading, is not only a specific feminine embodied state but also models new corporeal possibilities, where the engagement with another corporeal entity represents productivity and not threat. The sociological and phenomenological landscape where the visual field has resulted in the disappearance of the pregnant woman can be challenged through a corporeal landscape where subjectivity constitutes itself in more fluid forms (Maher 2002: 101).

¹⁴⁹ This is in contradiction to the transcendental or “masculine” sublime, which, as Mellor argues, represents the male writer’s desire to exert his control over the natural world (in Pipkin 1998: 599). The subject thus attempts to “master, appropriate, or colonize the other” as a means of overcoming the feelings of alienation and threat engendered by the sublime encounter (Freeman in Pipkin 1998: 599). As Pipkin explains, “through transcendence, the male writer seeks to escape the confines of the physical world in order to rejoin, on a ‘higher’ spiritual/intellectual level, an idealised nature that he has subdued” (ibid).

The *Placenta Pictures* arguably acknowledge all that is indeterminate and fluid within maternity, attesting to the porous and pliable nature of subject boundaries and the processual nature of this embodied state. As an organ turned to multiple sites, the placenta offers a reformed conception of subjectivity in terms that are inconsistent and unsettled, embracing different bodies and different selves. Maher contends that this may indeed lead to different conception of the maternal subject, noting,

Rather than seeking to reinstate the pregnant subject at the centre of the frame, the placenta allows for a new notion of subjectivity that does not depend on closed edges in order to construct itself. The identity of the pregnant subject, in this reading, is not threatened through the multiplication implicit in pregnancy, but is rather expanded and altered by the shifting corporeal terrain (2002: 97).

Beyond this, the sensuality and voluptuous tactility of the images aestheticise the maternal body in a way that neither sentimentalises nor sublimates the maternal subject. The visual beauty of the images is intensely attractive, while the bodily presence is indisputable, alluring even as it repulses. There are no established corporeal codifications here – the *Placenta Pictures* present a new visual landscape of the maternal body that references the pain and beauty of the violent act of birth.

4.2. “Undesirable rejected products”: The *After Birth Pieces*

In a style starkly contrasting the abstract fluidity and emotive content of the *Placenta Pictures*, Josephy’s incredibly detailed examinations of the small objects expelled by her post-parturient body offer a vastly different take on representation of the maternal body. Of these images, she writes:

... the photographs utilise the language of studio photography, which is usually used for the purposes of glamorising and elevating a product to make it seem more desirable. As with studio product photography, the human presence is absent. In these photographs the undesirable rejected products are reconsidered using the ‘inappropriate’ language of studio photography. There is ambivalence in viewing these photographs in which

the abjectness of the bodily product is in conflict with the seductive method employed in the photographing of them (Josephy 2006: 38-39).

By creating images of intimate, bodily products in such a composed, almost emotionally detached manner, the *After Birth Pieces* have a distinctly contradictory quality to them. An element of disassociation becomes discernible in the work, as though Josephy has intentionally removed any trace of herself from the frame, resulting in an anonymity being imposed upon the subject matter. The paradox, of course, is that a complete separation or distancing is in many ways impossible; the objects are, or at least at one time were, part of her, discarded pieces of her own body. Their corporeality is undeniable, as is their intensely personal origin. In this way, the *After Birth Pieces* imply a measure of alienation and objectification caused by the intense disruption to the self experienced through the birth process. It is perhaps conversely through disconnecting from the objects, both physically and to some degree, psychologically, that Josephy can begin to process the experience intellectually. The resultant sense of estranged aestheticization and detached observation suggests a degree of participation that is far more measured and calculated than is evident within the *Placenta Pictures*. Instead of “sink[ing her] arms into the abjection” (S. Josephy. Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012) in these works, Josephy appears rather to be gently pressing upon it, testing the limits of her own tolerance while simultaneously subverting the extreme sanitisation of popular maternal representation due to the undeniably abject nature of the subject matter. Josephy maintains the strong sense of ambivalence and emotional engagement regarding this work however, noting

... when I was in the studio and able to work with the lighting, or ... the machinery, the technology that you need to photograph things in a certain ways allow for you to work with it in a more objective way... so there's distance in the way that one does it, you know, in the way that you physically have to be in the studio. But while making those photographs or in making those photographs I didn't feel very distanced from it. I felt very, you know, it felt very raw. But the end product was making peace with it, in a sense, which I wasn't able to do until I'd gone through that process ... So I think it's all a continuum. I don't know or think at any time I was ever

more objective or distanced from it or less, more or less. I think I've gone through this entire range and I find myself at different places on the spectrum at any one time (S. Josephy. Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012).

Wrapped Placenta (2011), figure 6, consists of a neat, white package, tightly bound in plastic wrapping and secured with three, hospital-printed, barcoded stickers. The image has an extremely controlled, clinical feel, brought about firstly by the unadorned, synthetic covering of the product, as well as by the pure, white background. The shifted perspective to a downward camera angle within this photograph is also significant in comparison to the *Placenta Pictures*, in which the viscerality of the object completely immerses the viewer in its inescapable, overflowing content. In *Wrapped Placenta*, however, there is a measure of restraint as Josephy asserts herself and her lens over the object. A stark exploration of white on white, the clarity of the studio lighting and minimalist feel of the image recalls the slick, glossy composition of high-end, commercial product photography. Josephy has purposefully replicated this photographic genre to emphasise the 'packaged' quality of the object. As she explains,

When you get admitted to hospital, everything that you have has a barcode on it – they print out about three or four Fullscap [pages of] stickers that get stuck onto everything, onto all your files and virtually onto the baby's head. Anyway, as a result, that barcode is on [the placenta] so it does become even more ... packaged. [It's] like something you'd find in Woolworths, not just Pick 'n Pay, it's actually like Woolworths¹⁵⁰. It's like super-packaged, super-sanitised. And of course, [it has] that Woolworths kind of lighting, with a pure, white background [in which] everything is dropped out so it's very clean. So it could be cherries, or an apple or something. Anything that you desire (S. Josephy. Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012).

¹⁵⁰ Woolworths and Pick 'n Pay are two of the largest consumer retail chains in South Africa (both companies are also operational in other African and overseas markets). Known for its high quality and innovation, Woolworths is positioned as higher-end than Pick 'n Pay, supplying the majority of its food, clothing and general merchandise under its own brand name. Woolworths has a strong brand identity, and is known for a clean, simple aesthetic, reflecting quality and exclusivity.

That the neutral packaging divulges nothing of the visceral content within creates an interesting dynamic between the clean and the 'unclean' within this image. The contrast between the sterilised, constrained exterior and the threat of the uncontained liquidity of the placenta within echoes the contrived relationship between the 'packaging' of popular representations of the pregnant body compared to the actual, disruptive, at times distressing, embodied experience thereof. By emphasising the extreme restriction and sanitisation of the wrapped placenta, attention is paradoxically inferred upon the contemptible threat of it leaking beyond its bounds "in this really hideous way". By precluding all reference to the bloodied, bodily nature of the contents, that "which really, literally spills onto this white surface and ... destroys it" (S. Josephy. Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012), the 'inappropriateness' and anxiety-provoking prospect of the enclosed content is conversely brought to the fore. As Josephy calls attention to relations between the visible and the invisible, the innocuous and unremarkable quality of the bland, white package is revealed to be altogether misleading, as a disturbing undercurrent of that which is disordered and defies neat categorisation seeps beneath the penetrable, plastic surface. That it is Josephy's own placenta that has been photographed, as opposed to the innocence of "apples" or "cherries", exposes the sanitisation as contrived and artificial, giving this image its transgressive currency.

Josephy's image therefore opens up the frame to a far wider conception of maternal representation. Instead of restrictive notions of completeness and impenetrability communicated by much popular maternal imagery, the deliberate restraint and excessive objectification of *Wrapped Placenta* alludes to society's latent fear of the uncontrollable and undefined. As Josephy's body disintegrates into 'packagable' pieces, so she becomes the antithesis of bodily integrity: part object, part subject of a wholly dividing embodied experience. With the fragmented part symbolic of the whole, it can be argued that this is indicative of the wider control of the parturient body so emphatically enforced by medical discourse and popular maternal representation.

Umbilicus (2005), figure 7, is another of the *After Birth Pieces* that subtly undermines rigid boundaries of self and other, body and mind, process and stasis, pleasure and pain. It is an image of intense beauty and delicacy; the section of umbilical cord

included in the frame seems incredibly fragile, as the impossibly light, translucent membrane allows the myriad of soft, muted hues of blood vessels and arteries to be vaguely perceived within. The smooth, gel-like substance of the cord's outer film creates a gentle, textural interplay with the fibrous surface of the pure, white paper on which it is placed. The refinement and quietness of the image is again reflective of the sensitivity and respect with which Josephy approaches the subject matter. A far cry from the bloodied mess associated with the forcefulness of human intervention and the accompanying disregard for the by-products of medical operations, this image is by comparison 'clean' and untainted. It is invested with privacy and tenderness as the inherent beauty of the object, along with recognition of its role as a life-giving link, has been carefully captured and savoured.

The umbilical cord in this image does not appear as passive or inert, however, but is rather imbued with a sense of vitality and fluidity. The piece of corporeal matter still seems full of life, as though blood and other bodily drives continue to flow through its open channels. In this way, perhaps an implication of the image is that childbirth is a process without definite conclusion; the rupture it causes, although physically carried out, is never fully completed, leaving the maternal subject as an open system receptive to a relation of otherness and a form of intersubjectivity that recognises the 'other' within. In line with Kristeva's notion of 'heretical ethics', this presents a concept of embodied subjectivity that, in embracing the 'other' and the different, is never coherent but rather becomes "dissolved in relation to [the] other... tak[ing] meaning from others whose significance we in turn project" (Jones 1997: 44). As Oliver explains further, "Just as Kristeva brings the speaking body back into language by putting language in the body, she brings the subject into the place of the other by putting the other in the subject. Just as the pattern and logic of language are already found within the body, the pattern and logic of alterity are already found within the subject" (2004: 3). The bodily processes of identification/differentiation and incorporation/abjection so fundamentally experienced in relation to the subject's separation from the maternal body can thus never fully be accomplished either, leaving any sense of subjectivity as a "tenuous accomplishment" (McAfee 2004: 1) by which the subject makes and unmakes him/herself through the illusory wholeness of the 'clean and proper' body.

Continuing the visual language of studio photography, with the deliberate, bright lighting and dropped out background, *Umbilical Cord* (2011), figure 8, was taken after the birth of Josephy's second child in 2011. Although also of an umbilical cord, this image has an entirely different feel to *Umbilicus*. The spiralling shape of deeply saturated red, twisting in on itself seems almost synthetic, so lustrous is the sheen of its curious surface. The result is incredibly captivating – the intensity of the tones as well as the tight coil of tactile substance implore the viewer to pore over the twisted curves and bends. Just by looking at it one can almost imagine the sensation of touching its surface, the feel of the cold, jelly-like elasticity and yielding spring of its surface tension. It is indeed beseeching at the same time as its indeterminate viscosity leaves one feeling slightly repulsed, sickened by the corporeality of its gleaming coating.

As with Josephy's approach to photographing her second child's placenta, a degree of self-assurance is evident within *Umbilical Cord*, as she notes, "in terms of a second pregnancy there's less trauma and you've worked through some of the stuff ... you've seen it now, you've dealt with it" (S. Josephy. Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012). This cord seems far more robust than that of the earlier umbilical photograph, as though able to withstand more forceful handling. A sense of confidence and surety therefore comes through in the image, both on the part of the photographer and in the intrinsic quality of the cord itself; it is malleable but not compliant, flexible but not submissive. This is perhaps suggestive of Josephy's personal state throughout her second pregnancy. The birth process in particular was substantially less traumatising and victimising, as Josephy was, to a point, able to assert her desires and a far greater degree of control over the situation. Perhaps it is this sense of empowerment that becomes tangible within *Umbilical Cord*, as the subject is not dissolved by the permeable, transient state of maternity. As Josephy increasingly comes to terms with "the whole process of becoming a mother and that shift that I had to make, that process of being an artist and a mother" (Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012), so images like *Umbilical Cord* can be read as a powerful reclaiming of an embodied subjectivity that is not entirely broken or detached, but may contribute to a new found authority and self-assurance on the part of the maternal subject.

Josephy's use of the term *Lochia* (2005) as a title for figure 9 places her photograph of an otherwise quite obscure object within a specific medicalised and post-parturient frame of reference¹⁵¹. The indeterminate globule of bodily substance clearly has organic qualities, but without the descriptive designation would likely be incomprehensible to most viewers. Nevertheless, the desire to recognise something within the image speaks to a perverse sense of attraction, or what Julian Daniel Gutierrez-Albilla refers to as a "fascination with a kind of spectral decomposition of self" (2008: 71). As thrilling as it is repulsive, the abject quality of the "sickening yet irresistible" (Kristeva 1982: 3) particle undeniably displays that "certain slipperiness with regards to disgust, repulsion, revolt on the one hand, and fascination, attraction, desire on the other hand" (Chantler 2008: 111).

There is something alluring about the indefinable viscosity of the surface and the sordid subject matter of *Lochia*, which draws the viewer in at the same time as it offends, evoking sensations of revulsion that are impossible to ignore. One can easily imagine the carapace-like outer casing offering little more than feeble resistance to a more liquid, 'mucousy' interior. Like the lighter, uneven corpuscles at the fore of the particle, the object threatens to burst open and defile the flawless surface on which it is placed with its leaking, bloody matter. The stickiness of the envisioned substance, together with the more obvious quality of it being expelled through the vagina following birth, places lochia wholly within Sartre's characterisation of the *visqueux* (slimy) as feminine, associated with that which is "yielding, clinging, sweet, passive, possessive" (Krauss 1996: 92). Once again this description can clearly be extended to Kristeva's conception of the abject, so vividly described by Krauss as:

...a suffocating, clinging maternal lining, the mucous-membranous surround of bodily odors and substances, [through which] the child's losing battle for autonomy is performed as a kind of mimicry of the impassibility of the body's own frontier, with freedom coming only delusively as the convulsive, retching evacuation of one's own insides, and thus an abjection of oneself (1996: 91, 92).

¹⁵¹ *Lochia* is the term used within the field of obstetrics to refer to the normal uterine discharge of blood, tissue, and mucus from the vagina after childbirth (<http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/lochia>. Accessed 11 July 2012).

Just as the ambivalence of the abject both “beseeches and pulverizes” the subject (Kristeva 1982: 3), so Josephy’s image is both repellent and perversely captivating in its investigation of a kind of self-abjection engendered in the process of becoming a maternal subject. As much as the infant must separate from its maternal origin, Josephy too must undergo a process of expulsion or negation of the ‘mother matter’ from within her own body. By photographing these “undifferentiable substances” (Krauss 1996: 92) in such an alluring way, Josephy actively confronts the opposition and insecurity that may be felt towards these processes, highlighting the unmentionable ambiguity and sense of disintegration that may surround them.

4.3. “...showing and yet concealing the trauma to the body”: *Maternal Presence*

The final group of images from *Confinement* discussed within this thesis are those which make direct reference to “a human presence” (Josephy 2006: 38). Although all of the images are of Josephy’s own body, they are “cropped so close as to amputate them from their physical context” (Josephy 2006: 39), rendering the subject of the photographs anonymous. Instead of universalising what is depicted however, the anonymity and undisclosed quality in fact heightens the sense of intrusion and disturbance that accompanies viewing the photographs, as we are confronted with the most intimate, disconcerting instances of the immediate experiences of maternity. The conspicuousness of what are usually ‘hidden’ bodily encounters again challenges dichotomies of private/public and concealment/ exposure, raising pertinent questions regarding the visibility of ‘real’ embodied maternal encounters.

The three images considered here, namely *Caesarean* (2005), figure 10, *Epidural* (2005), figure 11, and *Lactation* (2005), figure 12, were taken by the artist while still in hospital following her first Caesarean. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that these images are arguably some of the most affecting within *Confinement*, as the profound physical trauma and a feeling of ambivalence at the body’s physical response to ‘becoming mother’ are defiantly brought to the fore. With boundaries between private and public resolutely collapsed, Young’s “positive narcissism” (1984: 45) is visually presented, as the ‘secret imperfections’ and damage to the post-

parturient body are so searchingly considered as part of the artist's earliest response to processes of understanding and healing.

The photograph of Josephy's truncated torso, *Caesarean* (2005), is one of the most unsettling, and perhaps personal, of the *Maternal Presence* images. As Josephy comments on the sense of absorption and engagement involved in creating this photograph,

...the one that I took in hospital with the suppurating, whatever it is, plaster, ... I was maybe more immersed in it than I was later when I was in the studio ... I think when you're standing in the bathroom next to your hospital room, you maybe are more immersed (S. Josephy. Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012).

Caesarean is a tightly framed shot of Josephy's pubic area and lower abdomen, taken a day or two after the delivery of her daughter. Describing the image Josephy writes, "a stained dressing forms an arc against the rounded form of the body showing and yet concealing the trauma to the body" (2006: 39). By accentuating the still discernible but greatly diminished curve of that part of the body so recently shared by two beings, the work alludes to both absence and presence – the removal of the baby from her body has left a permanent reminder of that embodied state "in which the transparent unity of the self dissolves" (Young 1984: 46) and from which one being becomes two.

Although it is the weeping, blood-stained dressing covering the freshly made incision into Josephy's flesh that is perhaps the most obviously distressing detail of the photograph, there are other more subtle elements that undoubtedly contribute to the extreme sense of discomfort engendered in viewing this work. The rough, spiky regrowth of pubic hair across the pelvis and upper thighs is one such detail. As is customary for most surgical procedures, prior to the Caesarean section the skin surrounding the area of incision is shaved, presumably by a member of the medical staff attending to the patient. Because in this case it involves the genital area, the invasiveness of this act is made even more prominent, as that which is usually done carefully, gently and intimately is made routine and forcible. There is no illusion of

care or discreetness accompanying this act. While the “suppurating plaster” can be seen to offer a degree of protection and privacy, concealing the delicate bodily area beneath it, the sharp stubbles of hair are in full view, alluding to the roughness with which they were cropped. Commenting on the sensations accompanying being shaved, as opposed to the Caesarean itself, Josephy notes,

The one you feel, the one you don't feel. ... There's a sense of passiveness that takes place, particularly in a Caesarean. The one active thing is possibly to give birth, but when you have a Caesarean it's something that is done to you. It's nothing that you do; you don't 'give birth', you 'deliver' via Caesar. Anyway, one is 'dead' from the arms down, whereas [being shaved is] something you feel. It's probably the last thing you feel, certainly in that area, until you wake up on the other side, although you don't 'wake up', you're awake through the whole thing, but you do, in a sense (S. Josephy. Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012).

She continues,

So I think that the pubic hair thing... [What happens is] someone comes along and they shaved you roughly, they don't shave you in a gentle, kind way. They first ask you if you've shaved yourself, which of course you in no way could do because you've got this enormous belly hanging over it, and then they look at you in horror or disgust and go 'ghhhh, ghhhh' [gestures shaving motion]. And I suppose it's maybe that lack of [gentleness], the uncaringness. It's not done beautifully; it's not done with care. And then after that this wound is inflicted on it and it lies there and sort of seeps... into these little prickles. I think it is uncomfortable; I think it's meant to be uncomfortable; I think it was uncomfortable. I think that image shows that 'uncomfortableness' in it (Ibid).

That the image is not symmetrical, with the body positioned slightly off-centre, contributes to a feeling of urgency, a kind of desperation in needing to capture something of the damage done to the subject before the healing process conceals the pain. Similarly, the subtle red furrows across the skin of Josephy's left hip made

by the elastic of her underwear add to the impression that the image is not posed or premeditated to the degree that the *After Birth Pieces* are. Instead, there is earnestness and insistency in taking this photograph that can almost be seen to replicate the feeling of crisis surrounding the operation itself. The moments following the birth of her child are thus not shown to be those of idealised, blissful union between the maternal subject and the infant. This image rather offers a radical subversion of the maternal bliss stereotype, offering an altogether alternate, discordant representation of what is involved in becoming a mother. After the intense vulnerability and passivity of the Caesarean, it is as though Josephy needs to regain control through the familiarity of being behind a camera, of documenting the reality of physical pain, in order to be able to process the experience intellectually and emotionally. In this way, being maternal becomes “an imminent threat to the individual’s notion of selfhood” (Wehling-Giorgi 2011: 78) and a wholly alienating bodily experience, rather than an idyllic, ‘natural’ occurrence.

Compared to the direct, visceral quality of *Caesarean*, *Epidural* (2005) offers a more oblique and sinister take on the invasiveness Josephy experienced. The image is an extreme close-up of “pallid skin”, upon which “a star-shaped purple bruise” (Josephy 2006: 39) has emerged, a tender remnant and ironic consequence of earlier pain relief. The visible pores of the skin evoke the body’s penetrability and the inadequacy of its threshold, calling attention to the ease with which both excretions and injections can permeate its boundary. Again there are no illusions of gentleness here; the flesh is shown to have been forcefully punctured as needle and catheter were evidently thrust deep into Josephy’s spinal column. The coldness of the blue-tinged light diffusing through the image infers the insensitivity of this act, as well as the unexpected furtherance of bodily marring.

The leaking breast of *Lactation* (2005), with its droplet of watery milk captured moments before it falls, evokes further discomfort through its inversion of the popular visualisation of the sexualised female breast. Already Josephy’s use of the medical term for the production of milk within the title places the breast in an entirely different register to popularised images thereof. The veined, mottled appearance and uneven texture of the skin heightens the subversive quality of the image, being so far removed from smooth flawlessness and idealised objectification of sexualised

corporeality. The extreme close-up of the discharging nipple discloses the ambiguity and duplicity of sexual and maternal identity, as Josephy interrogates patriarchy's "repressed understanding that the asexual maternal is always also the sexual feminine" (Jones 1997: 31). *Lactation* literally depicts the body leaking, its uncontrollable flows refuting impermeable boundaries and polluting the illusion of its 'clean and proper' state. Grosz articulates the affront such fluids cause to the subject's aspirations towards autonomy and self-identity, stating:

Body fluids flow, they seep, they infiltrate; their control is a matter of vigilance, never guaranteed. In this sense, they betray a certain irreducible materiality; they assert the priority of the body over subjectivity; they demonstrate the limits of subjectivity in the body, the irreducible specificity of particular bodies ... In our culture, they are enduring; they are necessary but embarrassing. They are undignified, nonpoetic, daily attributes of existence...that all must, in different ways, face, live with, reconcile themselves to (1994: 194).

There is an element of shame attributable to leaking breast milk. Unable to be reduced to a by-product of pleasure or the raw material of reproduction as is the case of men's body fluids and in which the subject partakes as active agent of transmission (Grosz 1994: 200, 203), the uncontrollable, excessive aspect of lactation speaks to the wider inability to 'contain' the (female) body. The liquidity of this body's borders and flows accompany notions of disorder, undecided limits and indeterminacy, implicated not only in revulsion towards that body, but in a sense of degradation and indignity directed at its processes. As Fiona Giles attests, there is an acculturated distaste for lactating breasts, by which "the idea of the breast remains a dry one, exemplifying containment, neatness and ... exquisite manners" (in Douglas 2010: n.p.). The wet breast is thus a deviant breast; it is indiscreet, unregulated and abject¹⁵².

¹⁵² This view extends to the practise of breastfeeding which, as sociologists Pamela Douglas (2010), Alison Bartlett (2005) and Cindy Stearns (1999) among others, assert is largely considered "deviant behaviour occurring in a potentially hostile environment" within contemporary western society (Stearns in Douglas 2010: n.p.). Due to it being unacknowledged and largely hidden from other women and broader society, breastfeeding as an embodied experience has been significantly devalued, with "very little written on breastfeeding... as a thoughtful intelligence, as a creative corporeal model" (Bartlett in Douglas 2010: n.p.). These authors argue that the

Besides the horror and humiliation engendered by the uncontrollable seepage, there is a sensuality implied in breastfeeding indicative of the physical bond between mother and child that exists outside of the paternal order, and is therefore threatening to it¹⁵³. Jenkins suggests that the sensuality of this bond is so strong that “it leads logically to the identification of the infant as lover. In the act of breastfeeding ... the infant takes on the role of lover to the mother’s body” (2006: 92). The inferred eroticism and associations of incest (as discussed in Chapter Three) thus attributable to breast milk add to the immense discomfort of this image.

There is however, a fragility and vulnerability to *Lactation* that prompts a deep ambivalence. In this way, the image functions in a manner similar to *Umbilicus*; the watery appearance of the milk together with the singularity of the poised droplet produces a sense of delicacy that makes the fluid seem almost cleansing, if not purifying. The innocuity of the near-translucent droplet creates a stark contrast to the discomfort of infiltrating veins, their bulging, invasive presence defiling the sacred space of the (imagined) smooth, pink nipple. The diluted white substance is not repulsively thick or indeterminate, nor violently discharged from the body. Josephy indeed likens the sensation of lactating to the body yielding, releasing itself, as she says, “it’s that moment when everything starts to sort of [gestures outward] ... That tightness with which we contain ourselves starts to...everything just loosens” (S.

“transmission of intergenerational breastfeeding knowledge in the West” has been severely disrupted and, together with its continued medicalisation, the loss of cultural memory regarding breastfeeding practise has resulted in a very narrow cultural and behavioural conception thereof (Douglas 2010: n.p). Further, following Bartlett (2004, 2005), Manne (2005), Giles (2003, 2004), Stephens (2004), and Sinclair (2005), “because she challenges us to abandon the oppositional discourses of independence and dependence, and instead conceptualise our humanity in terms of relationality and interdependence” (Douglas 2010: n.p.) the breastfeeding mother is seen as radically subversive within western society.

¹⁵³ Kristeva refers to the sensual relation between mother and infant within the semiotic, and thus before the child learns the ways of language and symbolism, as a manifestation of *jouissance*. She notes that it is in breastfeeding that mother’s most frequently experience this type of *jouissance*, and provides a bodily account thereof in the following poetic description:

Scent of milk, dewed greenery, acid and clear, recall of wind, air, seaweed (as if body lived without waste): it slides under the skin, does not remain in the mouth or nose but fondles the veins, detaches skin from bones, inflates me like an ozone balloon, and I hover with feet firmly planted on the ground to carry him, sure, stable, ineradicable, while he dances in my neck, flutters with my hair, seeks a smooth shoulder on the right, on the left, slips on the breast, swingles, silver vivid blossom of my belly, and finally flies away on my navel in his dream carried by my hands. My son (1986: 171).

Josephy. Personal interview, Cape Town, 10 May 2012)¹⁵⁴. The protruding, veined rivulets and leaking milk together convey a sense of irrepressible activity, the body revealed as matter and process, instead of form and stasis (Nead 1992: 63). In this way, the maternal body, “immeasurable, unconfined” (Kristeva 1986: 175), becomes an active site of both disruption and production. As “an image of social deviation” (Allara 1994: 11) by which dichotomies of inside and outside, suppression and liberation, subject and object dissolve, the pregnant and post-parturient body opens the maternal subject to a dynamic relation of otherness, whose “particularities”, for a time, “compose woman into a being of folds, a catastrophe of being” (Kristeva 1986: 185).

4.4. Conclusion

By exposing unstable borders that locate maternity as a state of transition, rupture and renewal, *Confinement* disrupts the patriarchal discourse surrounding motherhood. As a series, the varied, affective images of vulnerability and instability exult in the physicality of childbirth, as the “rawness and the violence of birth” (Josephy 2006: 39) is used subversively to reclaim the pregnant body. For the most part, Josephy uses the materiality of her own body as the tool of this resignification, with its vivid invasion and disintegration transforming maternity from an idealised expression of female ‘nature’ into something strange and profoundly denaturalised. Revealing the instances of physical abjection and intrusion that accompany the process of birth, *Confinement* reconfigures the maternal body to convey the transformative effects of lived body experience, attempting a more diverse, inclusive and ‘real’ representation of maternal subjectivity.

By creating a space in which to acknowledge the conflicting, fragmented yet productive identities of the maternal subject, Josephy’s body of work may indeed map “new topologies of the pregnant and birthing body” (Betterton 2002: 256) which re-evaluate the status of the maternal subject within cultural representation and

¹⁵⁴ There is an element within this description that is reminiscent of the physical sensation of crying. In *Stabat Mater*, Kristeva too places milk in the same register as tears, locating both within the semiotic order. She notes, “what milk and tears have in common: they are the metaphors of non-speech, of a ‘semiotics’ that linguistic communication does not account for ... They establish what is non-verbal” (in Bruzelius 1999: 226).

discourse. As Betterton suggests, this may serve as a useful starting point from which to “interrogate the relations between prevailing discourses around the maternal subject and the unstable subject of pregnancy, between what can be represented and what remains undisciplined and pathologized within discourses of motherhood” (2002: 256). The images thus function as a productive violence against the “historically confining aesthetic” (Betterton 2011: 262) of maternity and the silencing of the maternal subject which it effects. As “reproducer of [her] own reproduction” (Josephy 2006: 35), Josephy surely goes some way to help overcome the “difficulties [of] reconciling the role of woman as fleshy reproducer with that of woman as cultural producer” (Battersby 2006: 310).

CONCLUSION

Occupying a “unique site ... at the potent intersection between scientific possibilities, psychosocial practises and cultural representations” (*Studies in the maternal* <http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk/about.html>), maternal bodies offer multiple strategies and possibilities for thinking through issues of gender, human identity and social attachments. The works included in *Confinement* utilise this body as an effective place of resignification, destabilising the symbolic order and articulating an alternative maternal identity that recognises the generative and creative potential of the maternal subject. Depicting “a flesh that is imbued with sociality” (Betterton 2010: 3), the remarkable images reclaim a sense of authority over maternal representation and demonstrate how corporeal experience may lead to new forms of “personal defiance, empowerment, or self-realization” (Pipkin 1998: 601).

As maternity itself is “reconfigure[ed] from within, and without, in ways that interrogate the status of nature and human identity” (Betterton 2006:), the consistent call from scholars of motherhood is for a discourse of ‘feminist mothering’¹⁵⁵ that offers more diverse, plural and inclusive versions of women’s own experiences of maternal practise. This counternarrative of maternity is an oppositional discourse that is “constructed as a *negation* of patriarchal motherhood”, however one that remains “insufficiently developed, especially compared to the scholarship on patriarchal motherhood” (O’Reilly 2008: 3, 4). As questions continue to arise regarding the social and ethical implications of issues relating to maternal discourse – from technological developments in assisted reproduction, egg harvesting and embryology, surrogacy and adoption to ‘queer’ maternal bodies - theorists of feminist mothering advocate for these issues to be addressed in ways that challenge the inequities of patriarchal culture and affirm the “agency, authority, authenticity, and autonomy” (O’Reilly 2008: 7) of the women they impact. In this way, maternity may be revalued as a location of social change, radically restructuring social relations and ultimately helping to create a “new social subjectivity” (Russo in Betterton 2002: 266). The images in *Confinement* certainly produce a framework for engaging in this

¹⁵⁵ See O’Reilly 2008, Green 2011.

alternative maternal discourse, representing a new aesthetics of maternal embodiment from which the maternal subject may indeed “trouble the world” (Zerilli 1992: 114).

APPENDIX: ILLUSTRATIONS

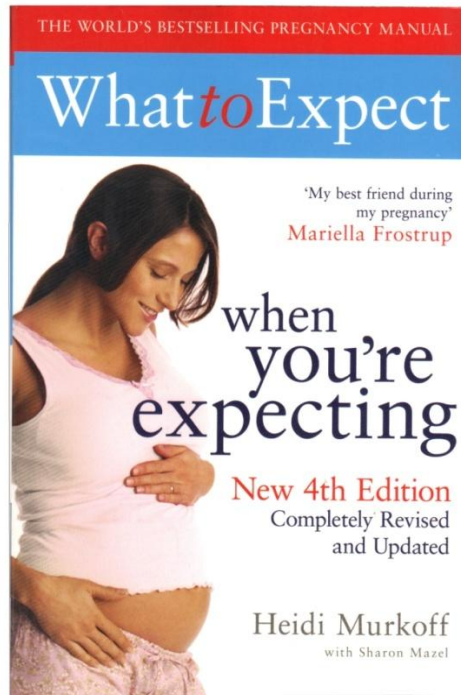


Figure 1. | *What to Expect When You're Expecting*. Colour publication cover, 105 x 21. New York: Workman.



Figure 2. | *Snaps: Sharing .your blessings*. Colour magazine, 210 x 285. *Your Pregnancy* 2011. [78] April/May.



Figure 3. | Gilles Bensimon 2005. *Britney Spears*. Colour magazine, 210 x 285. *Elle* (United States), October: 388-395.



Figure 4. | Gilles Bensimon 2005. *Britney Spears*. Colour magazine, 210 x 285. *Elle* (United States), October: 388-3



Figure 5. | Svea Josephy. *Placenta* (2005). 2250 x 1160.
Colour photograph. Private collection.



Figure 6. | Svea Josephy. *Wrapped Placenta* (2011). 255 x 170.
Colour photograph. Private collection.



Figure 7. | Svea Josephy. *Umbilicus* (2005). 255 x 170.
Colour photograph. Private collection.



Figure 8. | Svea Josephy. *Umbilical Cord* (2011). 255 x 170.
Colour photograph. Private collection.



Figure 9. | Svea Josephy. *Lochia* (2005). 255 x 170.
Colour photograph. Private collection.



Figure 10. | Svea Josephy. *Caesarean* (2005). 255 x 170.
Colour photograph. Private collection.



Figure 11. | Svea Josephy. *Epidural* (2005). 255 x 170.
Colour photograph. Private collection

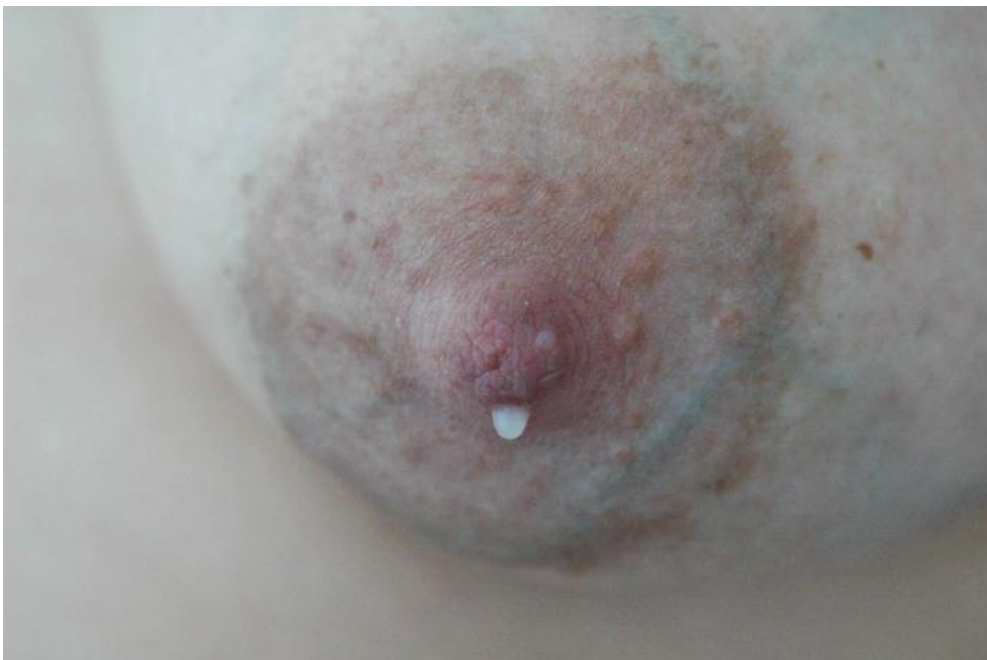


Figure 12. | Svea Josephy. *Lactation* (2005). 255 x 170.
Colour photograph. Private collection.

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